

The Narcotics Counterinsurgency Dilemma

**A Monograph
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AY 2008

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.					
1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 22-05-2008		2. REPORT TYPE SAMS Monograph		3. DATES COVERED (From - To) July 2007 – May 2008	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE The Narcotics Counterinsurgency Dilemma				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Major Thomas L. Galli(U.S. Army)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS) 250 Gibbon Avenue Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2134				8. PERFORMING ORG REPORT NUMBER SAMS	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Command and General Staff College (CGSC) 1 Reynolds Avenue Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S) CGSC	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for Public Release; Distribution is Unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT <p>The purpose of this monograph is to investigate the relationship and linkages between insurgencies and the illicit narcotics trade in general; to examine the specific root causes and influences on the drug trade and insurgencies in Colombia and Afghanistan; to examine the historic background, strategic theory, and viability of the Plan Colombia model for application in Afghanistan; and to propose an alternate strategy for Afghanistan based on the significant differences in culture and governance between the two countries.</p> <p>Plan Colombia commenced in 1999 when the stability of the Colombian government reached a crisis level from the dual threats of an insurgency and the illegal drug trade. While the Marxist-inspired insurgency has been in existence and a significant problem for nearly the past fifty years, it originally focused on building its support base through ideological means. The nexus between illicit narcotics and the insurgency increased over the past forty years due to a symbiotic relationship that provides sustained funding for the insurgency and sustained sanctuary and resources for the illicit narcotics industry. The primary assumption behind Plan Colombia was that a disruption in the revenue base from illicit narcotics would reduce the ability of the insurgents to conduct operations and for a opportunity for successful engagement and negotiated settlement. Plan Colombia focuses on four specific lines of effort, which are the fight against illicit narcotics and organized crime, economic and social revitalization within Colombia, strengthening democratic institutions, and the disarmament, demobilization, and re-integration of the insurgent and guerilla organizations into Colombian society.</p> <p>In Afghanistan, the nascent government is also dealing with an insurgency that derives economic and social support from illicit narcotics, although the root of the narcotics issue is significantly different than in Colombia due to a history of warlordism, lack of a national system, and tacit Western support via the mujahideen against the Soviets and Northern Alliance against the Taliban, which has significant implications in strategy development. Given an ostensibly similar situation <i>prima facie</i> in Afghanistan, President Bush, in 2004, proposed and funded a program aimed at establishing stable governance and fighting the illicit narcotics trade based on Plan Colombia, which to date has had limited results. While the functional framework of an insurgent or terrorist group deriving support through the illicit narcotics trade is similar between Colombia and Afghanistan, the differences in culture, history, and local conditions must be accounted for in successful development of strategy.</p>					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Counterinsurgency, Narcotics, Plan Colombia, Afghanistan, Strategy					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF: N/A			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT (U)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 73	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON Stefan J. Banach COL, U.S. Army
a. REPORT (U)	b. ABSTRACT (U)	c. THIS PAGE (U)			19b. PHONE NUMBER (include area code) 913-758-3302

SCHOOL OF ADVANCED MILITARY STUDIES

MONOGRAPH APPROVAL

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Title of Monograph: The Narcotics Counterinsurgency Dilemma

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Abstract

THE NARCOTICS COUNTERINSURGENCY DILEMMA by MAJ Thomas L. Galli, US Army, 73 pages.

The purpose of this monograph is to investigate the relationship and linkages between insurgencies and the illicit narcotics trade in general; to examine the specific root causes and influences on the drug trade and insurgencies in Colombia and Afghanistan; to examine the historic background, strategic theory, and viability of the Plan Colombia model for application in Afghanistan; and to propose an alternate strategy for Afghanistan based on the significant differences in culture and governance between the two countries.

Plan Colombia commenced in 1999 when the stability of the Colombian government reached a crisis level from the dual threats of an insurgency and the illegal drug trade. While the Marxist-inspired insurgency has been in existence and a significant problem for nearly the past fifty years, it originally focused on building its support base through ideological means. The nexus between illicit narcotics and the insurgency increased over the past forty years due to a symbiotic relationship that provides sustained funding for the insurgency and sustained sanctuary and resources for the illicit narcotics industry. The primary assumption behind Plan Colombia was that a disruption in the revenue base from illicit narcotics would reduce the ability of the insurgents to conduct operations and for a opportunity for successful engagement and negotiated settlement. Plan Colombia focuses on four specific lines of effort, which are the fight against illicit narcotics and organized crime, economic and social revitalization within Colombia, strengthening democratic institutions, and the disarmament, demobilization, and re-integration of the insurgent and guerilla organizations into Colombian society.

In Afghanistan, the nascent government is also dealing with an insurgency that derives economic and social support from illicit narcotics, although the root of the narcotics issue is significantly different than in Colombia due to a history of warlordism, lack of a national system, and tacit Western support via the mujahideen against the Soviets and Northern Alliance against the Taliban, which has significant implications in strategy development. Given an ostensibly similar situation *prima facie* in Afghanistan, President Bush, in 2004, proposed and funded a program aimed at establishing stable governance and fighting the illicit narcotics trade based on Plan Colombia, which to date has had limited results. While the functional framework of an insurgent or terrorist group deriving support through the illicit narcotics trade is similar between Colombia and Afghanistan, the differences in culture, history, and local conditions must be accounted for in successful development of strategy.

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Introduction

“I don't want to underestimate the difficulty of this because Colombia is paradise next to Afghanistan.”

- Anne Patterson, Former Assistant Secretary for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, regarding the narcotics trade issue in Afghanistan.¹

The statement above by Anne Patterson is prescient in regards to both approaching and attempting to solve the narcotics and insurgency problem in Colombia and Afghanistan, because leaders and policy-makers have a penchant to be extremely myopic when examining and understanding the nuances and complexities of different situations that may appear similar or even identical *prima facie*. More often than not, this lack of understanding will result in significant and undesired second and third order effects that further embroil money and manpower in difficult and ambiguous situations. The purpose of this monograph is to investigate the relationship and linkages between insurgencies and the illicit narcotics trade in general; to examine the specific root causes and influences on the narcotics trade in Colombia and Afghanistan; to examine the historic background, strategy, and viability of the Plan Colombia model for continued and expanded application in Afghanistan; and ultimately to propose an alternate strategy for Afghanistan based on the significant differences in culture and governance between the two countries.

Plan Colombia was initially conceived in 1999 when the stability of the Colombian government reached a crisis from the dual threat of an insurgency and the illegal drug trade. While the Marxist-inspired insurgency had been in existence and a problem for nearly the past fifty years, it originally focused solely on building its support base through ideological means. The nexus between illicit narcotics and the insurgency increased over the past thirty years due to

¹ Anne Patterson, “On the Record Briefing: Release of the 2006 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report.”(Department of State Press Briefing, Washington D.C. March 1, 2006).

a symbiotic relationship that provides sustained funding for the insurgency and sustained sanctuary and resources for the purveyors of illicit narcotics. The primary assumption behind Plan Colombia was that a disruption in the revenue base from illicit narcotics, along with the strengthening of governance, would reduce the insurgents ability to conduct operations and enable a greater opportunity for success in reaching a negotiated settlement in the peace process, as well as a reduction in the international drug flow. Plan Colombia was comprehensive and focused on four specific lines of effort: The fight against illicit narcotics and organized crime, economic and social revitalization within Colombia, strengthening democratic institutions, and the disarmament, demobilization, and re-integration of the insurgent and guerilla organizations into Colombian society.²

In Afghanistan, the nascent government is also dealing with an insurgency that derives economic and social support from illicit narcotics. While a similar problem to the one in Colombia, the root issues have a different dynamic due to Afghanistan's history of warlordism, lack of a national system of governance, and the transnational terrorist factor. These all have important implications in relation to region-specific strategic development. With that being noted, President Bush proposed and funded a program in 2004 aimed at establishing stable governance and fighting the illicit narcotics trade based directly on Plan Colombia citing the similarities between the two countries and their situations. The obvious question is if the U.S. is still being myopic in its approach to this seemingly similar problem. This study will argue that while the functional framework of a narcotics-based insurgency is similar between Colombia and Afghanistan, the differences in culture, history, and local conditions must be accounted for in the development of strategy. Therefore, two actions must occur for a Plan Colombia conceptual model to be successful as a strategic framework to reduce illicit drugs, strengthen governance, and fight an insurgency in Afghanistan. First, the plan needs to be examined in-depth to review

² Government of Colombia. Plan Colombia Progress Report: 1999-2005, 2006, 9.

and assess the specific successes and failures in Colombia, because the plan was not universally successful. Some would even argue that it completely failed its primary purpose to drastically reduce illicit narcotics production and trafficking. Second, the plan needs to be modified to account for cultural and historical differences, because a strategy based on a tradition of national government will likely not have success in a society where political power is garnered through tribal and clan status. This must also include a re-evaluation and modification of the desired outcomes and measures of effectiveness, because lofty goals like a 50% reduction of narcotics cultivation and production in five years, which was the stated original objective in Colombia, may not only be unrealistic but have severe effects on the population if forced.³

The Nature of The Illicit Narcotics Trade and Insurgency

In order to conduct an effective comparative analysis and understand the complexities of the situations in both Colombia and Afghanistan, it is first essential to understand the primary components of the conflicts and how they interact both as independent systems and as mutually supportive systems. Therefore, it is necessary to define both the nature of an insurgency and the nature of the illicit narcotics trade in order to identify the key elements within each that ultimately contribute to the nexus between narcotics and insurgencies.

Insurgent movements may arise and be conducted in various distinct forms, yet there are some baseline concepts that are pervasive throughout. David Galula, in his study of counterinsurgency warfare, defines an insurgency as “a protracted struggle conducted methodically, step by step, in order to attain specific intermediate objectives leading finally to the

³ Peter DeShazo, Phillip McLean, and Tanya Primiani. *Back From The Brink: Evaluating Progress in Colombia, 1999-2007*. (Washington D.C.: CSIS Press, 2007), 9.

overthrow of existing order.”⁴ Bard O’Neill expands on this definition in his study of insurgency and terrorism by highlighting that one of the key aspects of an insurgency is the discord between a ruling and non-ruling element where the non-ruling group “consciously uses political resources and violence” to achieve their objectives.⁵ Behind both of these definitions is the concept, which Mao Tse-Tung highlights in his treatise on guerilla warfare, that the political goal must be central for any insurgency to be successful.⁶ That goal provides the impetus behind gaining and maintaining popular support, or as Clausewitz would argue that the political purpose or cause is what stirs the passion of the people. Therefore, based on the definitions of Galula, O’Neill, and Mao, there are two concepts integral to an insurgency, which are social inequity and disparity of strength. A sense of social inequality, either real or perceived, between a ruling class and a non-ruling class provides the non-ruling class with the political purpose, identity, and will to initiate and maintain an insurgency. The conditions must also be present that prevent the non-ruling class from using solely political means to resolve their issues. Therefore, the insurgency becomes the only viable option for the disenfranchised by offering an alternate vision, hope, and means. Every increase in popular support for an insurgent movement results in a decrease in the ostensible legitimacy of the government. Finally, the disparity in strength prevents the non-ruling party from engaging in traditional warfare, at least initially, and forces the use of guerilla, or asymmetric, tactics.⁷

Based on these traits, the nature of an insurgency is ideological and social with an active intent to change a polity or regime that is viewed as unjust. The key elements in an insurgent system are the populace, the ruling elite (government), and the alternate ruling elite class

⁴ David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1968), 4.

⁵ Bard O’Neill. *Insurgency & Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, 2005), 15.

⁶ Mao Tse-Tung. *On Guerilla Warfare* (Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1961), 43.

(insurgent movement). More specifically, the government formulates and implements specific decisions that have an impact, either positive or negative, on the populace. In return, the populace either supports or rejects the decisions of the government. If the populace rejects the policy and has no instrument of recourse within the governmental system, then support turns to the insurgent movement in the form of manpower and resources. The insurgent movement attempts to maintain and increase support from the populace by providing a political vision that is counter to the government and also to establish social economic programs that the government is either unable or unwilling to provide. The interaction between the government and the insurgent movement are two-fold. They interact through the employment of propaganda and information campaigns that are designed to de-legitimize the other entity. The government and insurgents also interact through physical conflict. The conflict on the government's behalf is an effort to disrupt and destroy the insurgent organization, while the conflict on the insurgent's behalf is executed more to display the weakness and ineffectiveness of the government. The general dynamics of an insurgency as a system are outlined in Figure 1. The key to this interaction is the struggle between the government and insurgents for the support of the populace.

The illicit narcotics trade also creates a naturally de-stabilizing effect on national governments by creating a shadow economy based on narcotics. It also fosters a social support base in the populace that derives its survival and subsistence from that shadow economy while incorporating a pervasive criminal element into the society. The main components or functions of the illicit narcotics trade are production, trafficking, and consumption.⁸

⁷ Ibid. 54.

⁸ Cornelius Graubner, *Drugs and Conflict* (Eschborn GE: German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2007), 1.

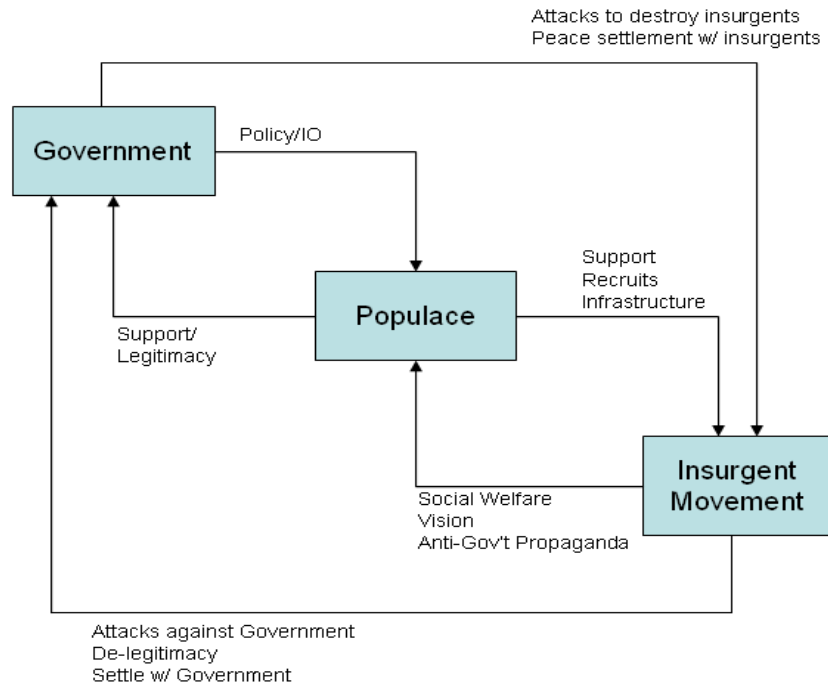


Figure 1: The System of an Insurgency⁹

Production is the supply-side and source level operation that extends from the farmers cultivating their crops to the refining and preparation of the narcotics from the raw resources. The key nodes of the production cycle are the subsistence farmers and landowners.¹⁰ The trafficking element involves the movement of the refined and prepared product from the source area to distribution points. The key nodes of the trafficking cycle are the organizations and people that actively conduct and support the transit of the illegal drugs. These can range from individual warlords and drug cartels to corrupt police and government officials.¹¹ The final element is the consumption element. Consumption is the distribution, sales, and usage of the narcotics on the demand-side. The key nodes of the consumption cycle are the dealers and individual users.

⁹ Bard O'Neill, *Insurgency & Terrorism* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, 2005), 15.

¹⁰ Cornelius Graubner, *Drugs and Conflict* (Eschborn GE: German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2007), 5).

¹¹ Ibid.

It is important to highlight two key dynamics that continuously fuel the illicit narcotics trade and illustrate the breadth of the problem. The first is the nexus of a legal economy with a drug economy. This creates a reliance on narcotics for both individual and national well-being and survival. It also sets conditions where elements of organized crime can rise to prominence within a nation and have a pseudo, if not a real, stake in the government. The second dynamic is the transnational system. Illicit narcotics have historically crossed borders to sell in more lucrative markets and this has not changed. Therefore international cash feeds these drug economies and further destabilizes legitimate governance. This market cash nexus is called the drug value added chain.¹²

Unlike an insurgency, where ideology and social inequity provide the main impetus to sustain the movement, the illicit narcotics trade gains its support and momentum through two factors alone, which are money and power.¹³ Therefore, the nature of the illicit drug trade is predominantly economic. It aims to maximize profits while preventing the destruction of its resources and structures. By successfully doing so, the viability and profitability of the production, trafficking, and consumption cycles is maintained.

At the production cycle level, the farmers and landowners benefit directly from the more lucrative illicit crops over traditional crops and receive payment from a drug lord or cartel for their product and services. The government attempts to counter this by an array of actions from improving social welfare programs in rural areas and increasing opportunities and benefits from traditional farming, which is also called alternative development and crop substitution, to the eradication of crops and refining laboratories.¹⁴ The trafficking cycle is dominated by elements of organized crime, which are the drug lords and cartels. The drug lords and cartels provide the

¹² Ibid. 6.

¹³ LaMond Tullis, *Handbook of Research on the Illicit Drug Traffic* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1991), 49.

vehicle to move the narcotics from the refining point to the distribution point, which is the most lucrative part of the illicit narcotics operation. The government attempts to counter this through interdiction, infrastructure destruction, and seizure of financial assets. A critical element in the classic system of illicit narcotics is the presence of rampant corruption that enables the narcotics trade and handicaps the government effort. At the consumption cycle level, the direct distribution and sale at the user level provides the purpose and financial fuel for the entire operation. The efforts to counter the consumption cycle have been on demand-side prevention and law enforcement. The interactions of the illicit narcotics trade as a system and are outlined in Figure 2.

The motivations and goals may differ significantly between an insurgency and the narcotics trade, but they are mutually supportive in practice primarily due to economic and security reasons. Both entities are targets of the government for marginalization or elimination, which gives them a common enemy and also forces both into areas of relative seclusion to conduct their operations. A sustained cash flow is always significant in the viability of an organization or business, and an insurgency obviously cannot survive without some form of funding.

The illicit drug trade also employs many of the same individuals that are active in an insurgency out of economic necessity. Peasant farmers are often at the receiving end of the social inequity equation and will be searching for any means of subsistence and survival. The moral argument against narcotics production is not very persuasive to a peasant that cannot feed his family, especially when the practice of pre-industrial drug use is a traditional and cultural norm which is not looked upon negatively as it is in more developed nations.¹⁵

¹⁴ Ibid. 129

¹⁵ James Bakalar and Lester Grinspoon, *Drug Control in a Free Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 69-70.

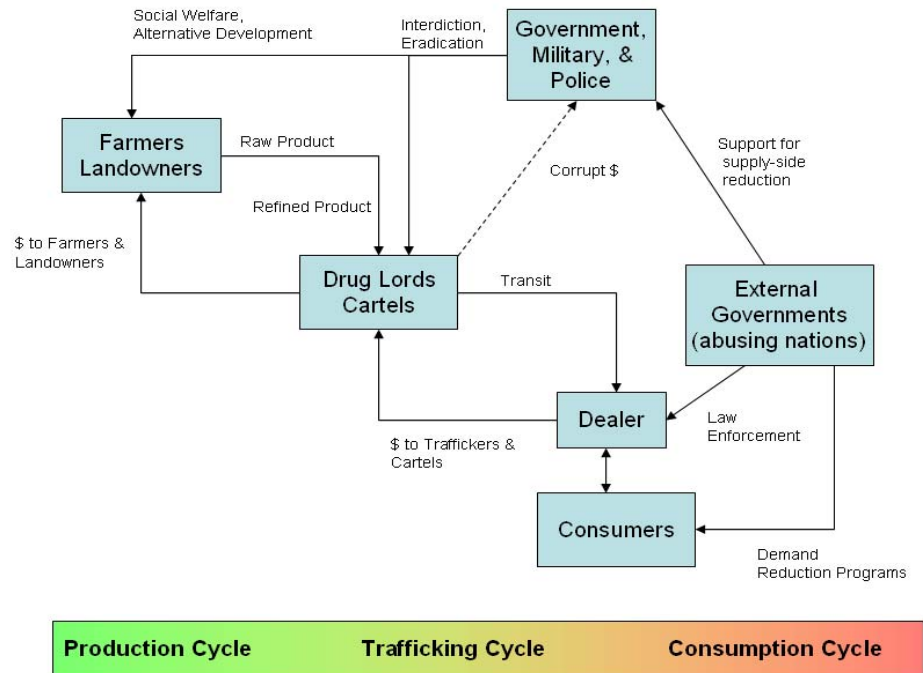


Figure 2: The System of the Illegal Narcotics Trade¹⁶

The resulting situation is an environment where the populace is sympathetic to both narcotics operations and an insurgency, which enables and perpetuates the presence of protective enclaves and support bases for both entities. Overall, insurgencies require financial and popular support and the narcotics trade requires resources and protection, which makes them mutually supportive. Therefore, the government is perceived as a common enemy with its desire to destroy both the insurgency and illicit narcotics industry, which highlights the underlying reason why these two seemingly different entities have become strange, yet very close bedfellows.

Another critical factor in the system of a narcotics-based insurgency is the presence of rampant corruption within the governmental structure. Corruption damages both the credibility and legitimacy of the government domestically and internationally. More importantly, it further

¹⁶ Cornelius Graubner. *Drugs and Conflict* (Eschborn GE: German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2007), 5.

empowers insurgent and criminal elements by disenfranchising the masses in the popular support base for the benefit of a wealthy minority. In Colombia, this has been the most significant obstacle in developing and sustaining a successful and stable national system. The foundations and interactions of the insurgency-narcotics trade nexus as a system and are outlined in Figure 3.

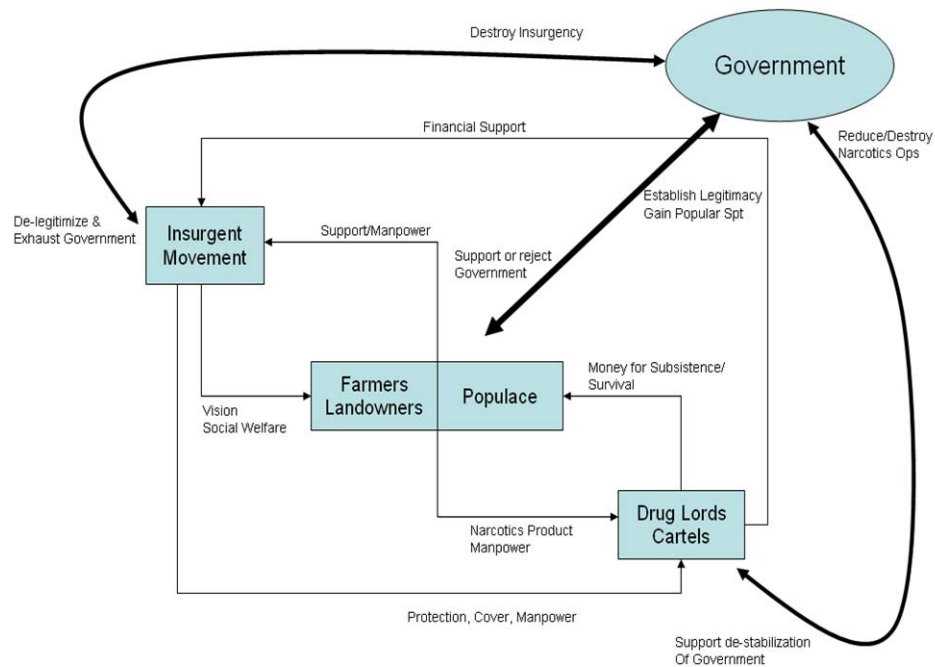


Figure 3: The Insurgency-Narcotics Trade Nexus¹⁷

Framing The Problem: The Colombian Situation

Colombia has been a country in tumult for nearly the past fifty years with various insurgent and paramilitary organizations that have actively threatened the stability of the government. Colombia has two primary insurgent organizations, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN). Both groups were

¹⁷Bard O'Neill, *Insurgency & Terrorism* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, 2005), 15.

originally conceived around a Marxist-Leninist philosophy that arose out of social discontent from the broadening gap between wealthy land-owners and the poorer peasantry.¹⁸

The FARC currently has 18,000 to 20,000 members and freely operates in 40 to 60 percent of the country.¹⁹ It operates in predominately rural areas that challenge the operational and tactical reach of the government forces. The stated objective of FARC is to seize national power in order to adequately implement agrarian land reform, improve social welfare throughout the country, but specifically among small farmers who have essentially been in serfdom under the wealthy land-owners, or *latifundista*.²⁰ Therefore, the main reasons for the rise of the FARC were the continuous disparity between social classes, economic monopoly of major industries, and inability to ever inculcate and develop an effective and fair national system of governance. Another factor in the rise of the FARC was persistent conflict within Colombia and a weak central government. Following a ten year civil war in the 1950's, referred to as *La Violencia*, the central government never re-established authority and control over many areas outside major urban population centers. This further empowered the FARC operating in those areas to rapidly expand in the virtually ungoverned space.²¹

The ELN is the smaller of the two insurgent groups, with only around 3,500 current members and only 5,000 members at the height of its prominence in the 1990s.²² It has more limited objectives that currently do not specifically seek to seize and control national power. The ELN was forged out of a Colombian student and clergy movement that focused on aggressively

¹⁸ Peter Chalk and Angel Rabassa, *Colombian Labyrinth* (Arlington, VA: RAND, 2001), 23, 30.

¹⁹ Information About the Combatants (The Center for International Policy, 2007, accessed October 15, 2007); available from <http://www.ciponline.org/colombia/infocombat.htm>

²⁰ Katharina Rohl, "Greed or Grievance: Why does the FARC keep fighting?" (Peace and Conflict Monitor: 2004, accessed October 16, 2007); available from <http://www.monitor.upeace.org/Colombia.pdf>

²¹ Norman Bailey, "La Violencia in Colombia," *Journal of Inter-American Studies* 9, no. 4 (1967): 561.

²² Peter Chalk and Angel Rabassa, *Colombian Labyrinth* (Arlington, VA: RAND, 2001), 30.

blending the activism of Marxist social development policies through the framework of Catholicism, which highlights why priests and clergy have often held key leadership positions in the organization.²³ This movement was also inspired and modeled very closely to the Cuban revolutionary model of 1959, in which Fidel Castro ascended rapidly to power.²⁴ Their initial objective was “national liberation” based on social equity and the rejection of foreign economic monopolies that were subjugating the Colombian populace.²⁵ In the recent decades the ELN abandoned the larger goal of national liberation in lieu of the ostensibly more attainable goal of gaining regional political control by leveraging the oil and natural gas industries.²⁶ This new approach reflects their unique geographic operating environment and greater willingness to have some engagement with the central government.²⁷

While the FARC operates primarily in the southern and western rural areas of Colombia, the ELN operates predominantly in a strategically and economically significant area of Colombia, which is the oil-rich geographic corridor between Colombia and Venezuela.²⁸ This is significant because the ELN may not possess the military manpower and strength of the FARC, but it poses a direct threat to both the local and central governments through the ability to disrupt the oil industry.

A more subtle, yet dangerous, enabler for the ELN, and the FARC to some extent, is the regional penchant in Latin America toward populism and neo-Bolivarism in the past decade. This can be seen by the tacit support of the neighboring populist regime of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela

²³ Colombia: The Prospects for Peace with The ELN (International Crisis Group: 2004, accessed on October 20, 2007), available from <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?l=1&id=1535> 5.

²⁴ Peter Chalk and Angel Rabassa, *Colombian Labyrinth* (Arlington, VA: RAND, 2001), 30.

²⁵ Colombia: The Prospects for Peace with The ELN (Bogota: International Crisis Group, 2004), 7.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Peter Chalk and Angel Rabassa, *Colombian Labyrinth* (Arlington, VA: RAND, 2001), 31.

for Colombian insurgents. This trend has the potential to further destabilize the Colombian government by exploiting the impotence of the United States throughout the region.

The presence of paramilitary groups has been another dynamic contributing to the instability and overall situation in Colombia. These paramilitary groups are right-wing organizations with the objective of fighting and defeating the leftist insurgent organizations. They fell under the auspices of one umbrella organization in 1997, the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), after years of fighting as a loose array of separate organizations.²⁹ The main dilemma for the Colombian Government is that the AUC not only operated as a counter-insurgent force, but that it quickly evolved into a mercenary force that would answer to no one in the central government.³⁰ In essence, the AUC operated with the primary objective of gaining power and money and not on a pro-government political agenda to defeat an insurgency. Therefore the AUC further destabilized the Colombian government and tested its legitimacy by illustrating that the central government and military could neither defeat the insurgency nor control the paramilitary group that had an ostensibly similar goal. Without significant strength and reach of the central government and military, the paramilitaries essentially became a lawless band of rogues that roamed the country-side committing atrocities in the name of counterinsurgency. Recently, the AUC reached an agreement with the central government to demobilize, but the de-mobilization has not been uniform and many of the former leaders and members within the AUC remain polarizing figures within the Colombian political landscape.³¹

²⁹ United States Department of State, *Colombia Country Report on Terrorism*, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of State, April 2007, accessed October 27, 2007; available at <http://www.nps.edu/Library/Research/SubjectGuides/SpecialTopics/TerroristProfile/Current/UnitedSelfDefenseForcesofColombia.html>).

³⁰ Center for Defense Information, *Terrorism Project: United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia*, (Washington D.C.: CDI), September 23, 2002, accessed on October 14, 2007; available at <http://www.cdi.org/terrorism/auc.cfm>

³¹ Douglas C. Judice, *Colombia's Attempt at Peace: An Analysis of the Demobilization of the AUC* (Monterey CA: Naval Postgraduate School, 2007), 3.

While insurgencies throughout the world often share many common systemic components and characteristics, as discussed previously, it is important to identify the specific factors that motivate each actor in an insurgency. This will enable an understanding of the fundamental issues and ultimately assist in strategy formulation and design. Therefore, this study will use Bard O'Neill's insurgent and terrorist framework for defining types of insurgencies to first look at the key actors in Colombia and later in Afghanistan to examine how similar systems may react differently due to their external environments.

In Colombia, the key actors identified from an insurgent standpoint are the FARC, the ELN, and the AUC. As mentioned earlier, the objectives of the FARC are to establish a new national government based on the Marxist-Leninist construct of social equity, which fits into Bard O'Neill's framework of an egalitarian insurgency. O'Neill's definition of an egalitarian insurgency is a "movement that seeks to impose a new system based on the ultimate value of distributional equity and centrally controlled structures designed to mobilize the people and radically transform the social structure within an existing political community."³²

The ELN, while purporting some similar Marxist-Leninist rhetoric and actions as the FARC, focuses more on the ideals of economic equity by changing the monopolistic structure of the oil industry within Colombia. This is a characteristic of a reformist insurgency, which O'Neill classifies as a movement that "targets policies that determine distribution of the economic, psychological, and political benefits that society has to offer."³³

On the other hand, the AUC is a paramilitary organization that has had different objectives from the insurgents. The explicit objectives of the paramilitary AUC were to destroy the leftist guerilla movement, which in essence would support the Colombian government, but its

³² Bard O'Neill. *Insurgency & Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books), 20.

³³ Ibid. 26.

obvious implicit objective was to maximize power for itself. Based on O'Neill's framework again, the AUC can be classified as a preservationist-commercialist type of movement. First, the preservationists "carry out illegal acts of violence against non-ruling groups and authorities that are trying to effect change," and second, the commercialists' primary goal is "the acquisition of material resources through seizure and control of political power."³⁴ In essence, the AUC only supports the status quo of government policy, as long as the central government does not actively oppose the organization and the conduct of its operations. The Colombian government finally did publicly oppose the AUC with pointed pressure from the Clinton and Bush administrations.³⁵

By illustrating the various natures of the insurgent groups within Colombia, the complexity of the system becomes quite apparent, because there is not one clear and coherent carrot and stick method that will satisfy all parties involved. When we look at the situation in Afghanistan and discuss the specific insurgent characteristics in that country, a situation that is quite different will become apparent, although it still remains within the common framework of an insurgency. This highlights the reality and pitfall that caution needs to be heeded when identical ideas and plans are proposed for different conflicts in different regions without fully understanding the underlying situational specific dynamics.

The insurgency issue is already a complex problem, but the issue of illicit narcotics on top of an insurgency adds one more very thick and tough layer to the onion. Therefore, the next aspect of the overall situation in Colombia that needs to be discussed is the pervasive presence and influence of the illicit narcotics trade.

As in almost all endeavors, the ability to successfully acquire and maintain funding is critical to an insurgency or paramilitary operation. The FARC and ELN originally secured most of their support from external sources that were sympathetic to their ideological cause and

³⁴ Ibid. 28.

³⁵ Ted Galen Carpenter, *Bad Neighbor Policy* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 74.

interested in fostering an imbalance of leftist regimes in the western hemisphere.³⁶ This changed dramatically with two key events, which were the rapid rise of cocaine use, specifically by Americans over the last quarter century, and the fall of the degradation of the global communist influence. The following dearth of external funding to support their operations addresses one part of the question over why ideologically based movements have turned to the illicit narcotics trade for support. Another answer, besides being a prolific source of funding, is that narcotics use has not had the same pejorative stigma among indigenous populations in both Colombia and Afghanistan as it does with people in the United States or Europe. In fact, in Colombia and other Andean countries, the practice of chewing coca leaves dates back for more than 400 years and is culturally acceptable among many, especially in the rural indigenous communities.³⁷ In addition, the amount of coca leaves typically used by individuals in the local populations does not have the same strength nor create the type of strong euphoric feeling that refined cocaine produces.³⁸

In Afghanistan, like Colombia, drug use has not historically been a significant threat to the population, with the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reporting that only 4% of the Afghan population being habitual drug users with the predominant drug of choice being hashish and not opium.³⁹ Therefore, the cultural and social environments dictate conditions that are favorable for this nexus, yet not widely understood outside of those environments. That being said, it is important to note that the usage and addiction trends are starting to change for the worse in the past decade, which is forcing both the governments and citizens of these countries to take notice.

³⁶ David C. Becker, *Morphing War: Counter-Narcotics, Counterinsurgency, and Counter-Terrorism Doctrine in Colombia* (Washington D.C.: National Defense University, 2004), 3.

³⁷ Ralph Bolton, "Andean Coca Chewing: A Metabolic Perspective," *American Anthropologist* 78 (September 1976): 630.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Executive Summary of 2005 Afghan Drug Use Survey* (New York: 2005), 3-6.

In Colombia, the FARC initially engaged in the narcotics trade by demanding and extracting tariffs for the cocaine and heroin produced in their areas of operation.⁴⁰ They quickly became increasingly involved in the active cultivation and trafficking process as their financial requirements increased.⁴¹ The irony of this change in course is that the FARC, which originally fought to protect the small agrarian peasant against the wealthy land owning conglomerates, ended up putting many of the same stressors on the peasant class through their tariffs and competitive production of illicit narcotics. This shift-change from servant of the masses to extortionist is reflected in polling statistics that claim the FARC has less than five percent of the popular support in Colombia.⁴² Even with a striking loss in support, the FARC is surviving and there is still a dichotomy between the urban and rural populations based both on reality and perception of the FARC. The urban population only sees the assassinations and violence, whereas the rural peasants do reap some benefits from the only social programs they know, which are provided not by the government of Colombia, but by the FARC.

Another significant factor that led to the insurgency-narcotics nexus in Colombia was the downfall of major drug cartels in the early 1990's. Throughout the 1980's and into the early 1990s, the Cali and Medellin cartels monopolized the illicit narcotics industry and dominated much of the socio-economic system within Colombia.⁴³ These cartels were aggressively and somewhat successfully targeted as part the over-arching Colombian and American strategy in the highly publicized War on Drugs. The unexpected consequence of the success against the two

⁴⁰ Cornelius Graubner. *Drugs and Conflict* (Eschborn GE: German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2007), 11.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Voice of America, "State of Emergency in Colombia," Voice of America Web Site, Transcript of radio interview with Angel Rabassa (RAND), Brad Hittle (ONDC), and Cynthia Arnson (Woodrow Wilson Center), accessed on October 18, 2007; available at <http://www.voanews.com/uspolicy/archive/2002-08/a-2002-08-21-6-1.cfm>

⁴³ Peter Chalk and Angel Rabassa, *Colombian Labyrinth* (Arlington, VA: RAND, 2001), 14.

cartels was a new flexibility and de-centralization within the narcotics industry where smaller organizations and networks filled the vacuum.⁴⁴

The fall of the cartels and subsequent de-centralization may not only be due to increased government involvement at countering their operations, but more likely due to the conflicting centers of power at that time between them and FARC. The cartels had a power base and network that focused on urban areas, whereas the social and economic power base for FARC remained in rural areas. FARC increased its support for rural narcotics operations which was a direct affront to the large urban-based cartels and ultimately caused those organizations to crumble. The de-centralization of narcotics operations to the rural areas was a natural evolution of this process and a way for FARC to gain economic influence and power. Therefore, the destruction of the cartels may have only been a pyrrhic victory because FARC was suddenly even more formidable to the central government.

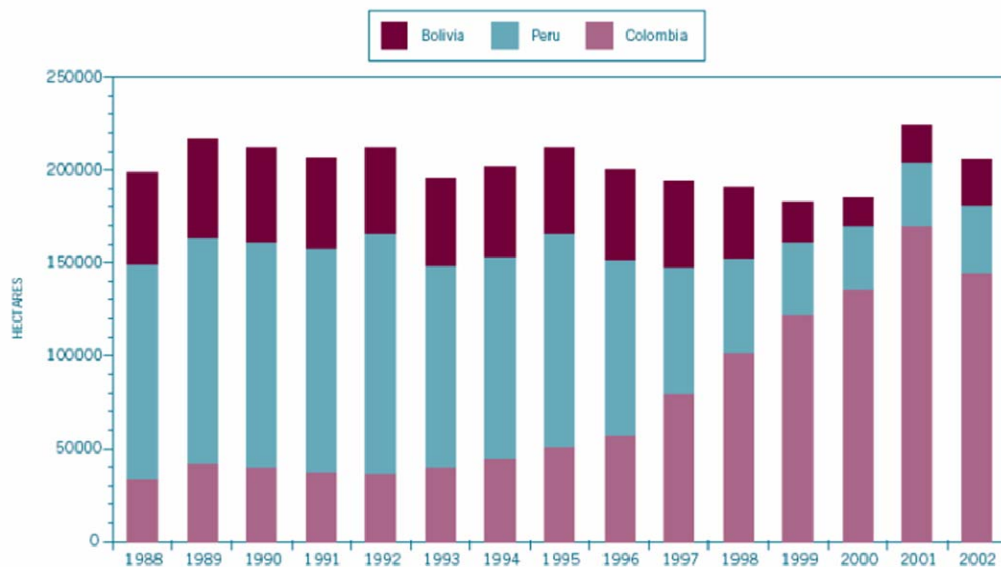


Figure 4: Andean Coca Cultivation 1988-2002⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Australian Bureau of Criminal Intelligence, "Australian Illicit Drug Report 1997-98", accessed on October 17, 2007; available at <http://www.crimecommission.gov.au/content/publications/>

⁴⁵ U.S. Department of State, 2003 International Narcotics Strategy Report (March 2004).

The de-centralization of the narcotics industry highlighted the natural symbiotic relationship between insurgent groups, paramilitaries, and smaller narcotics producers and traffickers. The smaller cartels required protection, logistics support, and manpower, while the insurgents required an increase in guaranteed revenues to maintain and grow their operations after losing the life-line from the former Soviet Union and its sympathetic agents. Therefore, both the narcotics industry and insurgent organizations had the resources the other required for survival. It should also not be a surprise that coca cultivation increased greatly when it was essentially de-regulated by FARC and not under the control of the larger cartels. Figure 4 illustrates the coca cultivation data for the Andean region from 1988 to 2004 with Colombia displaying the most dramatic increase in the mid to late 1990s coinciding with the move to de-centralized rural narcotics operations.

The impasse for both the governments of Colombia and the United States has been in strategy development by failing to clearly identify and target a center of gravity. Previously, the major cartels, more specifically the key leaders within those cartels, were the clear and non-debatable center of gravity in the fight against the illicit drug trade. Now with the de-centralization and new linkages with both the insurgent and paramilitary groups, the process of strategy development and implementation is more difficult than just targeting the leaders and assets of the major conglomerates.

Framing The Problem: The Afghan Situation

Afghanistan, like Colombia, is a country that has been in dramatic turmoil. While the Colombian government has been seriously threatened by the insurgent organizations, Afghanistan has been a perennial failed state with continuous warfare, a lack of any meaningful industrial economy, varying evolutions of both harsh and ineffective governance, and no experience or pre-conception of a national form of government. Whereas the United States always had a significant

interest in Colombia due to its hemispheric location, the U.S. record in Afghanistan is one primarily of neglect and disinterest except for the ten year period of the Soviet-Afghan War and the current Global War on Terror. This is important because some U.S. actions, policies and inactions contributed in part to the problems in Afghanistan today. It is also worth noting that the vacillating nature of power and control within Afghanistan often makes the line between governance and insurgency indistinguishable.

The three entities that form the core of the insurgency in Afghanistan are the Taliban, the Al Qa'ida terrorist network, and the multitude of warlords that base their power and control along clan and ethnic lines. The idea of examining only three insurgent forces in a system as complex as Afghanistan may appear a bit simplistic due to the fact that every province has numerous clans and tribes that are historically in an incessant power struggle, but these disputes fall under the larger shroud of warlordism and tribal conflagrations as a critical dynamic of an insurgency.

The Taliban arose out of the continuous fighting and rampant corruption between different factions of the mujahedeen, which was the fighting force actively supported by the United States and Pakistan, among others, that forced the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan in 1989.⁴⁶ What the U.S. failed to understand in the 1980's is that the mujahedeen were not fighting because they disavowed Communism or did not like Soviet authority. The real reason is that the mujahedeen loathed foreign influence and occupation in their tribal lands. This is a painful fact that the U.S. is just now learning with the current involvement in Afghanistan.

Instead of uniting nationally after the withdrawal of the Soviet forces in 1989, the mujahadeen reverted back to their ethnic and tribal roots. They were again a fractured conglomeration separated along ethnic lines that perpetuated the continuous warfare and

⁴⁶ Sarah Chayes. *The Punishment of Virtue: Inside Afghanistan after the Taliban* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 69.

atrocities by power-seeking warlords.⁴⁷ The U.S. also lost interest after the Soviet withdrawal having achieved the objective of thwarting Soviet expansion. This turn of events left the mujahadeen and Afghan warlords to their own devices leading to the ultimate removal of the Najibullah government in 1992 and subsequent civil war.⁴⁸ The significance of all this from a counter-narcotics standpoint is that nothing was done to counter the opium boom that grew rapidly during the ten years of war against the Soviets. The US focus, which was the defeat of communism, trumped any interested in curbing the illicit narcotics. Therefore, in the 1980's, the problem was continually marginalized in the media, generally overlooked by politicians, covertly supported by the CIA and finally ignored and forgotten in the 1990's.

The Taliban, which started in the *madrassas* of southern Afghanistan along the porous Pakistani border, gained prominence through promises to end the bitter civil conflict with the stated objectives to “restore peace, disarm the population, enforce Sharia law, and defend the integrity and Islamic character of Afghanistan.”⁴⁹ In fact, there were some early indicators that the United States would look favorably on the Taliban. Ahmed Rashid, in his study of the Taliban, discusses that the prospect of any form of stability in the country coupled with a government that was clearly anti-Iranian was favored by the Clinton administration as late as 1997.⁵⁰ An example of this attitude is a visit by Taliban officials to the U.S. in 1997 in search of finalizing an oil pipeline deal that the Clinton administration was a proponent for.⁵¹ Any favorable penchant would later change quickly after the true nature and conduct of the Taliban became apparent. Ironically, but not surprisingly, the rise of the Taliban did not bring social

⁴⁷ Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 21.

⁴⁸ Edward Girardet and Jonathan Walter. *Afghanistan* (Geneva: Crosslines Publications, 2004), 268.

⁴⁹ Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 22.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 46.

⁵¹ Caroline Lees, “Oil Barons court Taliban in Texas,” *The Daily Telegraph*, December 14, 1997

equity and justice as advertised. Instead it only intensified the ethnic violence within the country and subjected the population to one of the most austere and unforgiving versions of Islamic law and societal code observed in the modern world. Society under Taliban rule was based not solely on the orthodox practices of Deobandi Islam, but was also heavily influenced by the cultural practices and traditions of Pashtun tribal society, which only further exacerbated the ethnic nature of the internal conflict.⁵² Until the United States intervened in 2001, the Taliban had been slowly consolidating territory moving southwest to northeast, highlighted by the capture of Kabul, the nation's capital city, in 1996.⁵³ In reality, Afghanistan has not had the semblance of a state since 1992 and has merely been contested territory.

The Taliban are unique as an insurgent group, because unlike the FARC and ELN in Colombia, the Taliban were the predominant authority in much of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, but a relatively unpopular one. While traditionally many insurgent groups operate under the auspices of fighting a flawed government policy or corrupt regime, the challenge for the Taliban is greater due to its pejorative record in governance and polarizing effect on the population. The Taliban lost much of its leverage outside of the sympathetic Pashtun polities due to their orthodox interpretation and forceful implementation of Sharia law in conjunction with the brutal treatment of non-Pashtun ethnic groups. Therefore, while the current goal of the Taliban is to re-establish authority and control by highlighting the impotence of the fledgling Afghan government, their support base naturally comes exclusively from areas of traditional support like the Pashtun tribal regions. The true challenge for Afghanistan, both for the new government and any insurgent movement, is the ability to build a support base among the multitude of different clans, which is a monumentally difficult task given the mutual history of mistrust and violence

⁵² Amalendu Misra, *Hot Spots in Global Politics: Afghanistan* (Malden MA: Polity Press, 2004), 70.

⁵³ Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 48.

among all involved. This perpetual discord among clans is one reason why no single insurgent organization or government has achieved any type of sustained success and longevity. The result is that civil war, and not a unified insurgency, is the norm for Afghanistan. Other contributing factors to the current situation of the Taliban are that the military efforts directed against the Taliban successfully pushed them away from population centers, which made it more difficult to re-constitute and establish a new support base. In addition, the Taliban view their version of Islam as a cohesive factor in itself that will unite the populace. Ironically, the only time the Taliban enjoyed any sort of strong popular support was when the movement was in its infancy. The promise to quell the violence of the post-Soviet era civil war and end large-scale government corruption followed the traditional insurgency model of improving quality of life by countering social inequity.

Overall, both insurgencies in Afghanistan and Colombia require a popular support base for ultimate success, but the methods to achieve that success differ greatly between the FARC and Taliban. The Taliban believe success can be achieved by defeating the enemy and that popular support will be gained through their vision of Islamic order. The FARC believes success can be achieved through providing a better quality of life than the government is willing or able to provide. Therefore, the differences are not necessarily in the theoretical framework, but in the ideology and organization of the insurgent movements. Both rely on destabilizing the national government structures.

Once again, understanding the type of insurgency is essential for both analytic comparison and strategic development. The core concept for the Taliban is the process of returning to strict Sharia law, albeit laden with Pashtun tribal influences. This is a clear example of what Bard O'Neill refers to as a reactionary-traditionalist type of insurgency. O'Neill describes this type of insurgency as one that wants to "articulate primordial and sacred values

rooted in ancestral ties and religion,” and desires to “reestablish an ancient system idealized as a golden age.”⁵⁴ This is important because the core of the insurgency is not based on policy or regime reformation as in Colombia, but on a religious and social ideal. This is referred to as a “military-focus” strategy, because the belief is that popular support will be gained by defeating the enemy, and not necessarily through the Mao model of gaining mass support in order to defeat the enemy.⁵⁵

The next key entity in the discussion of the Afghan insurgency is the Al Qa’ida terrorist network. While Al Qa’ida is not a traditional insurgent organization due to its’ transnational role in proliferating terrorism, its role in Afghanistan cannot be minimized or overlooked.⁵⁶ The comprehensive goal of Al Qa’ida is to establish a global caliphate based on the Salafist interpretation of Sharia law, but the objective within Afghanistan is multi-variate.⁵⁷ First, Al Qa’ida wants to prevent any improvement in border security between Afghanistan and its neighbors, specifically Pakistan, which would threaten their enclaves and freedom of movement. It can be argued that the Pakistan-Afghan border has never been secure and neither country has ever been able to govern or control the Pashtun dominated region. That being said, a more secure border would threaten key supply lines for resources and funding, to include the movement of narcotics and other black-market products. A prime example of one of these enabling areas on the border periphery is Peshawar inside Pakistan. Peshawar is a major transit hub for both the illicit opiate industry and terrorist groups that needs to be a focal point of interdiction

⁵⁴ Bard O’Neill. *Insurgency & Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books), 21.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 56.

⁵⁶ Intellnet.org, “Al Qa’ida: Ideology and Strategy.” <http://www.intellnet.org/documents/200/060/269.html> (accessed November 4, 2007).

⁵⁷ Bard O’Neill. *Insurgency & Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books). 65.

operations.⁵⁸ Second, Al Qaeda wants to support the groups that can offer them local protection and support, which means they value long-term organizational survival over a short-term ideological objective, which may be a point of tension and friction between them and the Taliban. Third, they want to continue to finance both their local and transnational terrorist operations. These goals are all motivations for Al Qaeda to fight against the establishment of an effective pro-western government in Afghanistan. Ideally, Al Qaeda would prefer a resurgence of the Taliban protectorate, but will suffice in the short-term with the status quo of a weak and ineffective central government that has minimal capability to disrupt or destroy its operations. Therefore, it is clear that the very presence of Al Qaeda is a disruptive force that threatens the establishment of a credible national system in Afghanistan.

Like the Taliban, Al Qaeda is essentially an organization that adheres to the traditionalist view of an insurgency, which is observed by the ultimate objective of a global caliphate for Al Qaeda and the return to strict Sharia traditions of the Taliban. The one nuance to Al Qaeda's strategy is the concept of having a military-focus on a global scale.⁵⁹ According to Bard O'Neill, the significance of this strategy is that the popular support again will be accumulated over time with each defeat of western and non-Islamic entities culminating in the global caliphate.⁶⁰ These are the strategic traits that distinguish the Taliban and Al Qaeda from insurgent organizations like the FARC and ELN in Colombia. The concept of conducting a protracted popular war based on a political ideology is certainly not the primary motivator.

Finally, the third key actor, or group of actors, in the Afghanistan insurgency framework are the various warlords that have managed to maintain a virtual steady-state of civil war for the

⁵⁸ Paul Harris, "Victorious warlords set to open opium floodgates," *The Observer*, November 25, 2001.

⁵⁹ Bard O'Neill. *Insurgency & Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books).. 66.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 66.

past thirty years. The warlords and their followers typically come from various different ethnic groups and will fight along, clan, tribal and ethnic boundaries. These groups include the predominant Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks and Shia Hazara to name the largest entities.⁶¹ They will seldom mix nor establish any long-term binding agreement or alliance. Alliances between warlords and their followers are developed purely out of convenience, which is often induced by the threat of a larger and more powerful enemy, but these alliances are also quickly liquidated when the larger threat is gone and the conditions are permissible to resume their tribal conflicts. The warlords have little desire or incentive to become part of a national system, which is obviously a strong de-stabilizing force for the central government. They fall into the category of commercial insurgents in Bard O'Neill's framework, because their primary influencer is maintaining and increasing their power.⁶² Although the Karzai government is in place, like Najibullah 16 years ago, it can be said that the warlords de facto have the power within Afghanistan and not the central government. The insurgency-narcotics nexus developed and expanded more naturally in Afghanistan than it did in Colombia, due primarily to the fact that the very nature of Afghan society and politics is feudal. There were no monopolistic cartels that had to be defeated in order to de-centralize the production, trafficking, and distribution of narcotics. There was also no tradition of a national system of government as in Colombia, which at least provided a framework for representative government and justice.

The opium boom truly began during the Soviet occupation in the 1980's, although opium had been produced regionally prior to this timeframe. Figure 4 illustrates the progressive growth of Afghan opium production over the past 28 years. The mujahadeen cultivated record amounts of poppies for refinement into opium along the Pakistan border with the tacit approval of the

⁶¹ Amalendu Misra, *Hot Spots in Global Politics: Afghanistan* (Malden MA: Polity Press, 2004), 52.

⁶² Bard O'Neill. *Insurgency & Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books), 28.

Pakistani military and under the selectively blind eye of the United States. The CIA covertly supported the production and sale of Afghan heroin as a funding conduit for the mujahadeen and additionally as a way to debilitate the Soviet forces.⁶³ In fact the covert operations in support of the mujahadeen in Afghanistan were the most expensive in history up until that time with a cost of \$3.2 billion dollars.⁶⁴ Even in the very early phases of the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan in 1980, there was no confusion among senior U.S. leaders that they would be actively supporting the narcotics trade. David Musto, a member of the President's Strategic Council on Drug Abuse warned against supporting opium growers by proposing a paid eradication program as an alternative.⁶⁵ Musto's concern was based on the possibility of Afghanistan becoming a full-blown narco-state, which seems quite prescient in hindsight. It is also now clear that these efforts played a role in the current situation where the opium trade is one of the only fully functioning industries in Afghanistan because the conditions were set during the Soviet occupation for the warlords to gain both the knowledge and the experience in the narcotics trade to fully and professionally exploit it in order to fund their individual conflicts.

In this respect the insurgencies in Afghanistan and Colombia are similar. Both primary insurgent groups, the FARC/ELN and Taliban/mujahadeen, initially turned to the cultivation and traffic of narcotics to sustain an armed conflict given their natural resource disparity. Additionally, in both countries rural farmers became reliant on profits from narcotics cultivation for survival. The critical difference is that the Afghan insurgency is rooted in traditional tribal conflict whereas the Colombian insurgency is rooted in social-economic improvement.

⁶³ Robert I. Rotberg. *Building a New Afghanistan* (Cambridge, MA: Brookings Institute Press, 2007), 181.

⁶⁴ Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair. *Whiteout: The CIA, Drugs and Press* (New York: Verso Books, 1998), 259.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 260.

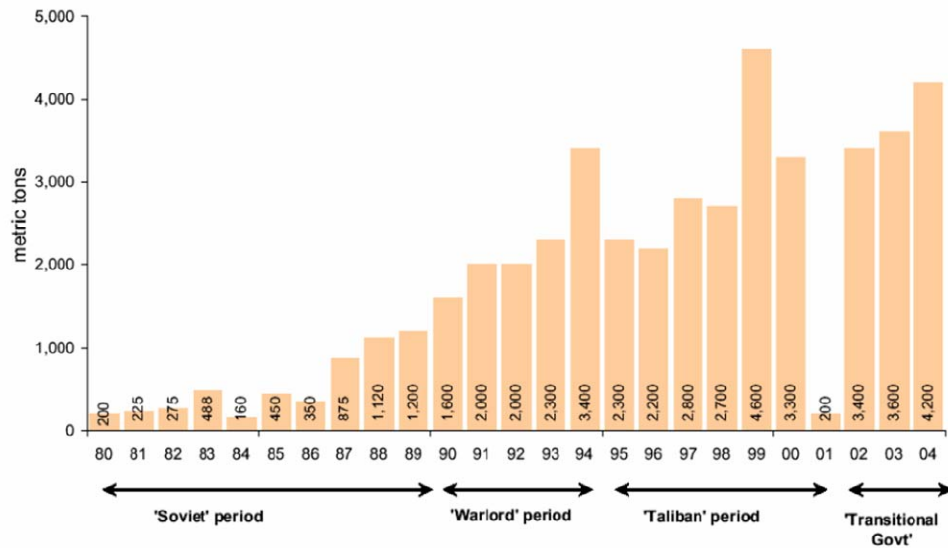


Figure 5: Afghan Opium Production 1980-2004⁶⁶

So far, this monograph has focused primarily on the theory and historical context that set the conditions for the current situations in both Colombia and Afghanistan, but in order to truly understand the breadth and scope of the problem it is important to look at the current dynamics of Afghanistan as a narco-state. Afghanistan is dominated economically and physically by poppy cultivation accompanied by the inability of the government to manage ethnic and clan disputes. The next section discusses the reasons and dynamics of why the modern state of Afghanistan is closer to a failed state than many are willing to recognize. It also highlights the Afghan-specific issues and significant challenges for any plan designed to establish stability of governance and fight the narcotics trade.

The Narco-State of Afghanistan

Due to the lack of any large-scale industrial or agricultural base, in conjunction with the lack of a formal and regulated banking system, opium plays a critical role in the economy of Afghanistan. The Afghan economy works primarily off the informal *hawala* system for money

transfer, which requires individuals to maintain physical caches for credit and savings. Since there is no formal banking system and hard currency is often a rare commodity, opium stores have become a popular source for both credit and savings.⁶⁷ This is significant because the process of dismantling a narco-economy will be difficult and unpopular without a viable and understandable economic system to take its place. The *hawala* system is the accepted Islamic system in the country and any attempt to completely remove or change this system will likely meet strong resistance if not fail outright. The fact that opium poppies account for an estimated 38.2% of the Afghan GDP highlights the significance of the issue and the realization that Afghanistan has evolved into a true narco-state.⁶⁸

Another economic issue associated with the poppy cultivation and opium production is the cost of labor. Like the peasants in FARC controlled areas in Colombia, the benefit of growing coca or poppies far outweighs the other options available. In Afghanistan, a day's wage working growing poppies ranges from \$3 to \$10, which dramatically exceeds anything being offered to grow legal crops, like wheat, or to work on other infrastructure and development projects.⁶⁹ The result of this disparity is a growing labor shortage that further contributes to the stagnating economy and national infrastructure. One Mullah, Mullah Abdul Rashid in the Badakshan province, summarizes the dilemma over laboring in the poppy fields quite succinctly

⁶⁶ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *The 2004 Afghan Opium Survey* (Geneva: UN Publications, 2005), 4.

⁶⁷ U.S. Department of State. *2007 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report* (Washington D.C.: Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, 2007) <http://www.state.gov/p/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2007/> (accessed December 1, 2007)

⁶⁸ Morgan L. Courtney. In *The Balance: Measuring Progress in Afghanistan* (Washington D.C.: CSIS Press, 2005), 68.

⁶⁹ April Witt. "Afghanistan is Becoming a Narco-Mafia State," in *Current Controversies: Afghanistan*, edited by Jann Einfeld (New York: Greenhaven Press, 2005), 46-51.

when he states that “in the future, we hope it (poppies) will be eradicated. Now, it’s everywhere because people need it to survive.”⁷⁰

Compounding the problem is the fact that the vast majority of the irrigation systems in the country, which are vital to a nation that is 85% agrarian with limited internal sources of water, were damaged or destroyed during the decades of fighting since the Soviet occupation.⁷¹ Many others simply eroded due to the lack of a viable public works system. This dilapidated irrigation system has led to a situation that seemingly encourages farmers to grow poppies, because poppies require less water than many other traditional crops, like wheat. Poppies also do not require large swaths of arable land that rely on formal irrigation as other crops and are also more resistant to climatic changes like a drought. The fact that Afghanistan suffered under drought conditions from 1998 to 2004 is yet another ironic factor that discouraged any move to traditional crops and enhanced the poppy boom.⁷² The re-construction and maintenance of the irrigation system throughout the country is essential to stimulate any sort of economic improvement and re-vitalization.

The most critical obstacle in Afghanistan has been in regard to the expansion and resourcing of the Afghan National Army and police forces. In Colombia, this was by far the most important issue for both Presidents Pastrana and Uribe. They understood that the baseline requirement for any progress, against either an insurgency or illegal drug trade, was to actively address how they could establish and sustain a security presence in remote areas. The commander of the criminal investigations division in the Badakshan Province Police, Fazel

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Yusuf Nuristani. “Interview with Yusuf Nuristani – Afghan Minister for Irrigation and Environment on April 23, 2003” IRIN News, <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=19587> (accessed December 21, 2007).

⁷² Morgan L. Courtney. In *The Balance: Measuring Progress in Afghanistan* (Washington D.C.: CSIS Press, 2005), 68-69.

Ahmad Nazari, summarizes the disparity between the police and narco-traffickers, “They (the narco-traffickers) have motorbikes, pistols, mobile phones, and tight communication. The police who are trying to combat those smugglers have nothing.”⁷³ Commander Nazari also discusses how many officers in the police force take bribes by the drug smugglers in order to survive because they are only sporadically paid by the national government.⁷⁴

In addition to the faltering security situation, the clan and tribal nature of Afghan society has also hindered substantial improvement. While President Karzai was elected on a platform of national reconciliation, this same policy also spread power among the traditional warlords who placed personal and clan priorities above those of the provinces or regions they supposedly represent. This should not be surprising because it is not a new development and has been the historical precedent in Afghanistan. The issue is that it perpetuates lawlessness and provides exactly the type of environment where insurgents and criminals can operate unbridled. The Afghan people, leaders and institutions were clearly neither ready nor capable of making this cold-start into a national and democratic style of government.

Another facet in regards to the issue of governance is that Afghanistan is also sorely lacking in bureaucratic capacity. There are almost no structures at the national level to effectively bridge the gap and administer down to the provincial level. Unfortunately, like infrastructure growth, the process of increasing capacity is labor, money, and time intensive. It will also not succeed without external support. The key is to make it an Afghan oriented system and not a U.S. imposed system, which could take a few different forms to include official recognition of the semi-autonomous regions with the possibility of an Afghan-defined constitutional federation. That very well may be the ideal scenario, yet the current situation is less promising and actually

⁷³ April Witt. “Afghanistan is Becoming a Narco-Mafia State,” in *Current Controversies: Afghanistan*, edited by Jann Einfeld (New York: Greenhaven Press, 2005), 46-51.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

foreboding. An Afghan government that is both ineffective and inefficient will not survive in the long-term and continue to be a safe haven for terrorists and insurgents.

To date there have been various efforts to counter-narcotics and improve the viability of the Afghan government. The problem is that many of these efforts have not been integrated, lacked focus and resources, or just not appropriate given the situation in the country. Shortly after the Taliban were usurped from power, the Afghan Interim Authority banned all poppy cultivation, trafficking and drug use in January of 2002 as stipulated in the Bonn Accords.⁷⁵ This mandate was then followed by at least four more iterations of a strategy that focused primarily on crop eradication up until 2004.⁷⁶ Overall, these were little more than knee-jerk reactions to international pressure that did very little. The regional governors, or warlords, and farmers alike were also not interested in abiding by the eradication mandates because the opium and heroin trade is too lucrative and no substantial alternative development was being offered. Other methods, like lump-sum payments to stop growing poppies also had minimal success and actually had the opposite effect in many cases, where farmers would continually re-plant every season in an attempt to receive additional payments. Too often though, farmers who did comply in the hope of receiving compensation discovered that it was a false promise when they were either under-compensated or not paid at all.⁷⁷ These actions did much more harm than good in both curtailing the opium market and establishing government legitimacy. More importantly, the underlying factor behind these failed attempts is that the central government has had no enforcement capability. Trust and good will do not go far in Afghanistan without any hard checks and balances.

⁷⁵ Christopher M. Blanchard. *Afghanistan: Narcotics and U.S. Policy* (Washington D.C.: CRS Report, 2004).

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Jon L. Anderson, "The Taliban's Opium War," *New Yorker* 83, issue 9 (2007)

From the perspective of Hamid Karzai, the hope has been that at a minimum, the eradication mandates would buy time and increased funding from the U.S and international community. While time has passed, it may very well have been wasted time because the overall situation has been deteriorating with little forward progress in security and stability.

In May 2003, Afghanistan released its counter-narcotics strategy with the clearly unattainable goal of reducing opium poppy cultivation by 70% in five years, which is oddly similar to the equally unrealistic goal of reducing cocaine production by 50% in five years under Plan Colombia's initial projections.⁷⁸ This counter-narcotics strategy was expanded in scope in 2004, when the U.S. and Afghan government jointly implemented a strategy coined "Plan Afghanistan" by the Assistant Secretary of Narcotics and Law Enforcement, Robert Charles.⁷⁹ This plan was based on five pillars that were modeled on the tenets from the experience in Colombia. The five pillars were in public information, alternate livelihoods programs, poppy eradication and drug interdiction and law enforcement and justice reform.⁸⁰ While disjointed, this plan does deserve some credit because it is the first time any effort was made to synchronize the efforts of the interagency partners and coalition. The problem is that the planners greatly underestimated the reliance on poppies in the agrarian sector and still put too much emphasis on crop eradication and not enough on alternative development and infrastructure improvement. The Karzai administration itself contributed to this strategy's failure due to its inability to control and influence anything beyond the city limits of Kabul.

While law enforcement is mentioned in the five pillar plan, it is important to notice that security and rapid capability growth have not been pursued aggressively. In Colombia, security and force projection were the foundation and critical requirement for the success of the other lines

⁷⁸ Christopher M. Blanchard. *Afghanistan: Narcotics and U.S. Policy* (Washington D.C.: CRS Report, 2004).

⁷⁹ Ibid.

of effort, which President Pastrana made very clear from the onset of Plan Colombia by his incessant push for extensive funding and strengthening of the Colombian military. In Afghanistan, it almost appears like nobody wanted to admit there was a serious security problem, to include the U.S., or that the Karzai administration had less control and influence than was being advertised in the media. There also seems to be an issue of passivity in the new Afghan government, where they are comfortable having the NATO ISAF and U.S. forces do the heavy lifting, instead of taking the initiative and ownership in security operations. The underlying factor to this ineffectiveness is once again due to the fact that most Afghans still identify themselves with their tribal affiliations and not as a unified nation.

This is in contrast to the attitude of the government in Colombia, which took an early and extremely aggressive approach toward security operations. While the U.S. assistance was undoubtedly instrumental in Colombia, the Colombians took the lead in all aspects of the effort. Therefore the same level of effort must be given to the Afghan government for security purposes and the Afghan government needs to reciprocate that with interest, dedication and aggressive action.

The situations in Afghanistan and Colombia are not dissimilar on the surface. The key linkage between the illicit narcotics industry and the insurgency in both Colombia and Afghanistan is economic. Both have areas of ungoverned space that foster a thriving insurgency and criminal element. Both countries have governments that are severely susceptible to corruption and both countries have elements of their population that feel or have felt some level of disenfranchisement from the central government. The fight in both countries will also be won or lost by whichever entity can garner and sustain popular support. This goes back to understanding the structural similarities of narcotics-based insurgencies, which is very important, but it may also lead to missteps or failure without first understanding the cultural nuances. An

important difference between Colombia and Afghanistan is that the Colombian insurgents and paramilitary forces were fairly unified within their own organizations, whereas the more parochial tribal and clan affiliations in Afghanistan do not present a unified entity that can be easily targeted in one over-arching strategy. The FARC and ELN specifically were unified around principles of social and economic upheaval. In Afghanistan, ethnicity and clan-based power is a source of national disunity and major problem for the government. The process of targeting warlords is even more challenging because the U.S. actively supported many of the individuals involved in the illicit narcotics trade during the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001. This contributed to the current situation because many of these individuals were subsequently rewarded for their efforts by the Karzai government with positions of power and areas of control. Given the circumstances in 2001 this was a reasonable means to an end to ouster the Taliban and put Al Qa'ida on the defensive. Unfortunately, we can now see that it just re-emphasized the social rifts that have been present in Afghanistan for centuries when it comes to unified governance. The concept of a national system is not a natural fit for Afghanistan even under the best circumstances, but given the fact that many of the regional governors are corrupt drug traffickers further destabilizes the government and dims the long-term chances for success. In Colombia, while corrupt politicians taking drug money was not uncommon and certainly tarnished the national system of government in that country, the criminal element involved in the illicit narcotics trade never became a pseudo-partner of the central government as seen in Afghanistan. A better way to look at it is that in Afghanistan the illicit narcotics trade has become deeply entwined within the government structure, whereas in Colombia it has remained in opposition.

Therefore, after evaluating the situation and efforts to establish stability and counter the illicit narcotics trade in Afghanistan, it is time to review the paradigm used in Colombia in greater detail to see what practical applications it has, or does not have, for a new strategy in Afghanistan. The Plan Colombia model is also a good examination of what the U.S. expectations

and objectives should and should not be when dealing with both an insurgency and narcotics issue abroad.

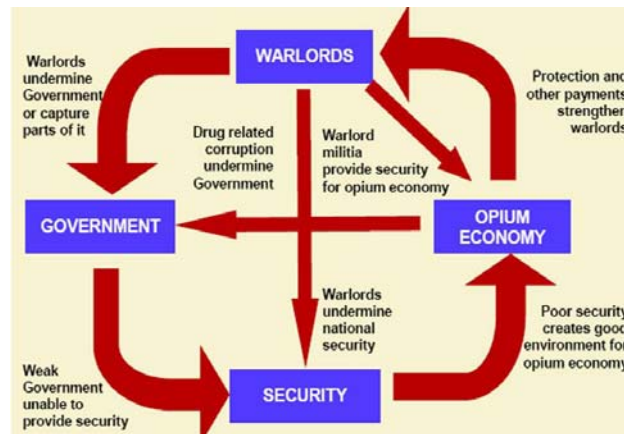


Figure 6: The Afghan Narcotics Security Relationship⁸¹

The Plan Colombia Paradigm

Since 2004 there have been many indicators that the United States was first modeling after and now actively implementing a program to fight the insurgency-narcotics problem in Afghanistan based directly on the strategy employed in Colombia. In January 2007, General Peter Pace, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at that time, stated publicly that the Plan Colombia construct was a “good model for President Hamid Karzai to consider as he looks at how to reduce the amount of drug trafficking in his country.”⁸² This statement came in conjunction with the announcement that the former ambassador to Colombia, Ambassador William Wood, would accept a new post as the Ambassador to Afghanistan.⁸³ These events are clear signals that the United States’ made a policy decision that the Plan Colombia paradigm was

⁸¹ The World Bank. Afghanistan: State Building, Sustaining Growth, and Reducing Poverty, Report No. 29551-AF (World Bank, 2004), xvii.

⁸² Joshua Goodwin, “Pace Says Colombia Model for Afghanistan,” *The Washington Post*, January 19, 2007. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/19/AR2007011901948.html> (accessed September 18, 2007).

⁸³ Ibid.

not only effective and successful in Colombia, but that it could be implemented universally. This assumption of universal implementation and how this strategy should be successfully implemented in Afghanistan will be examined in the following sections. It is first necessary to outline the conception, components, and overall efficacy of Plan Colombia in order to understand the paradigm. This section will investigate the construct by answering the following questions: 1) What is Plan Colombia and how was it conceived and developed? 2) Has this strategy been effective in Colombia? 3) What factors have contributed to the success and/or failure of this strategy?

Plan Colombia unofficially began in the late 1990's with the election of Andres Pastrana, who was the favored candidate by the Clinton administration. Pastrana's election rejuvenated the effort to jointly counter the narcotics issue within the Andean region.⁸⁴ This new cooperative environment came after a period of time in which the previous government in Colombia, under the Presidency of Ernesto Samper, had been accused of being corrupt and in collusion with the drug cartels and traffickers.⁸⁵ The U.S. in turn de-certified the Colombian government for non-compliance, which froze most financial aid and military support to that nation.⁸⁶ The irony of the de-certification stigma is that some of the greatest success in countering the illicit narcotics trade occurred while Samper was president, which included the disintegration of both the Medellin and Cali drug cartels.⁸⁷ Whether these significant achievements were accomplished due to American pressure or national self-preservation is still debatable.

Upon the election of Andres Pastrana, the Clinton administration increased military advisors and hardware for the Colombian government almost immediately, with the one

⁸⁴ Peter Chalk and Angel Rabassa, *Colombian Labyrinth* (Arlington, VA: RAND, 2001), 3.

⁸⁵ ⁸⁵ Ron Chepesiuk, *Hard Target: The United States War Against International Drug Trafficking 1982-1997* (Jefferson N.C.: McFarland & Co. Inc. Publishers, 1999), 149.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ted Galen Carpenter, *Bad Neighbor Policy* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 53.

important caveat that the assets and funding were to be used to counter the narcotics problem and not the insurgent or paramilitary organizations, which is like telling a police officer he can use deadly force against shop-lifters but not murderers⁸⁸ Ultimately, the Clinton administration agreed to support the conceptual proposal of Plan Colombia, with \$1.3 billion dollars for the region and \$862 million dollars approved by Congress in 2000 solely for Colombia, which was the largest commitment at that time to countering narcotics and for Colombia.⁸⁹

The terrorist events of September 11th in the United States resulted in a dramatic shift change in how the new administration of President George W. Bush would approach Colombia. Would the focus go completely to the international terrorist threat or would it be expanded within the hemisphere? Al Qa'ida and Afghanistan were the immediate threat, but how would the U.S. balance the Global War on terror with previous hemispheric threats?

The answer was to lump the threats together and to introduce 'narco-terrorism' in South America as another direct threat to the U.S. The mere word 'terrorism' opened doors for Colombia. The new approach removed the restriction that U.S. funds and equipment could not be used in counterinsurgency operations, which is noted by the fact that the U.S. State Department placed the FARC on the top of the list for terrorist organizations in the western hemisphere.⁹⁰ The significance of this change is that the Pastrana government could now more freely and openly combat the insurgency within Colombia under the GWOT umbrella while satisfying the interests of the United States in both counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism. President Pastrana's comments at a White House press conference reflect this new attitude when he states that "we have the full support of President Bush and the government, first in trying to, as you

⁸⁸ Ibid. 61.

⁸⁹ Peter Chalk and Angel Rabassa, *Colombian Labyrinth* (Arlington, VA: RAND, 2001), 62.

⁹⁰ International Crisis Group, *War and Drugs in Colombia: Latin America Report No. 11* (Bogota: January 27, 2005) 21.

said, Mr. President, in change of authorities the use of the military equipment sent by the United States to Colombia to be used against also narco terrorism, not only against narco trafficking.”⁹¹

Although the rhetoric may sound good, one problem that became a recurring issue was unity of effort. Old habits die hard and the United States gave little credence to nation-building early in the Bush administration, either directly or indirectly. The United States still pressured the Colombian government to place primacy on the counter-narcotic aspect of the plan, while the Colombian government viewed the insurgency and strengthening the socio-economic structure as the more urgent issue critical to ending the long-standing insurgency.

Plan Colombia in itself is an aggressive and comprehensive strategy that has four main lines of effort, which are the fight against drugs and organized crime, promoting economic and social re-vitalization, strengthening democratic institutions and establishing a peace settlement with the insurgent groups and ultimate re-integration into Colombian society.⁹² The sub-components are outlined in Figure 4. More specifically, the Colombian military is the lead agent in fighting narcotics and organized crime through the eradication of crops, interdiction of the narcotics networks and extradition of narco-traffickers and terrorists for prosecution.⁹³ This effort focused on the expansion of the Colombian military with an emphasis on establishing rural security through increased mobility and intelligence, primarily through an increase in air platforms.⁹⁴ The economic line of effort attempts to lower inflation and unemployment while expanding Colombian involvement in Latin American free trade in order to re-vitalize the economy.⁹⁵ The social line of effort is tied into the economic line and focuses on providing

⁹¹ Andres Pastrana, White House Press Conference, April 18, 2002.
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/04/20020418-6.html> (accessed on October 10, 2007).

⁹² Colombian Department of Justice and Security – National Planning Department, *Plan Colombia Progress Report: 1999-2005*, September, 2006.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

education and nutrition for families in all provinces, creating new government sponsored employment possibilities centering on infrastructure development and re-settling displaced families from the civil war.⁹⁶

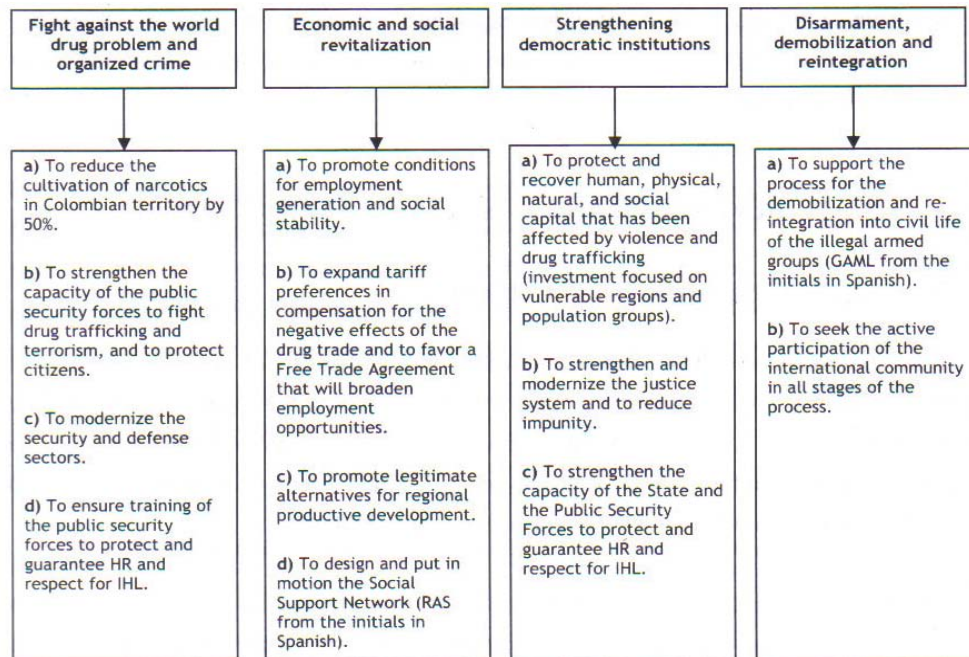


Figure 7: Plan Colombia Lines of Effort⁹⁷

The absence of a viable alternative development strategy for farmers and industrial growth is striking considering that the lower classes have almost solely subsisted off the narco-economy. They clearly need greater options and incentives to change their practices. The strengthening of democratic institutions emphasizes improving the effectiveness and integrity of the justice system at the national and local levels. It also includes adherence to international standards on human rights when conducting operations against the paramilitary and insurgent forces.⁹⁸ The final line of effort, which is de-mobilizing and re-integrating insurgents relies on

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Peter Chalk and Angel Rabassa, *Colombian Labyrinth* (Arlington, VA: RAND, 2001), 63.

incentives provided by improved economic and social conditions, as well as the equity provided by a democratic government that is not influenced by corruption or power-elites.⁹⁹

Referring back to the classification previously covered in this study, which depicts the FARC/ELN insurgency in Bard O'Neill's framework as an egalitarian-reformist insurgency, the comprehensive Plan Colombia concept of providing social equity in a democratic framework with mutual concessions directly addresses the source of discord between the government and insurgent groups. Therefore it is a strategy that has the potential for success given that proper and adequate resources are applied to it. The difficulty with any plan is two-fold in this tenuous situation. First, the psychological recovery from the stigma of armed conflict for the past fifty years must be overcome with the allowance for reconciliation on both sides. Second, the insurgent groups must be willing to concede power they have established and build a level of confidence in the new national vision.

In order to examine the efficacy of Plan Colombia, each line of effort must be surveyed. Too often, proponents and critics alike have claimed over-arching success or failure of the strategy by only examining a single aspect or area of the plan. The reality is that Plan Colombia has many indicators of success in areas like stability of governance, judicial control, and economic growth, yet it also has many indicators of failure in other areas, like narcotics production and interdiction. It is these mixed results that make the plan controversial as a holistic approach in Afghanistan. It also raises the question over what the primary goal of the strategy should be. Is it countering illicit narcotics, government stability, or both? This issue of competing priorities highlights an often unspoken area of tension between the United States and Colombia. The tension is over what aspect deserves greater weight and which government is the primary decision-maker. This section will analyze what aspects of the plan were successful in Colombia

⁹⁹ Colombian Department of Justice and Security – National Planning Department, *Plan Colombia Progress Report: 1999-2005*, September, 2006.

and should be considered for an Afghan strategy. This section will also highlight areas of failure that should be avoided or altered in Afghanistan.

The most disturbing result in Colombia, and one that has raised many eyebrows among U.S. politicians and public alike, is that the extremely high investment of almost \$8 billion dollars since 1999, has had a negligible dividend, if any, in countering cocaine production and price, which has been and will remain the central item of interest for Americans.¹⁰⁰

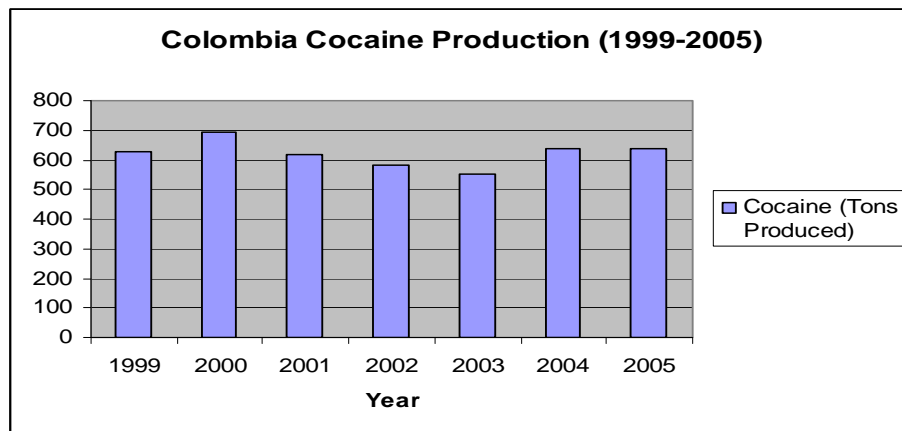


Figure 8: Colombian Cocaine Production 1999-2005¹⁰¹

The statistics shown in Figure 7 are from a United Nations annual report on drug production. While estimating narcotics production is not an exact science, it shows that in the first six years of the eradication and interdiction campaign, there was actually a net increase in cocaine production from 1999 to 2005, from 630 tons to 640 tons annually, although there has been a downward trend in the past three years. This constitutes roughly 75% of the total cocaine produced among the major narco-production and trafficking countries in South America.¹⁰² The controversial practice of eradicating narcotics producing crops by aerial fumigation has also

¹⁰⁰ Center for International Policy. "Colombia Program: U.S. Aid to Colombia since 1997 Summary Tables." <http://www.ciponline.org/colombia/aidtable.htm> (accessed November 26, 2007).

¹⁰¹ Rafael Pardo. "Statement regarding The Situation in Colombia." (Statement given at the colloquium on Colombian national security issues hosted by the Center for Latin American Studies and Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College, Washington D.C. April 18, 2007)

¹⁰² Ibid. 2.

generated new animosity toward the government from the rural class, which has hurt the counter-insurgency effort to some extent.

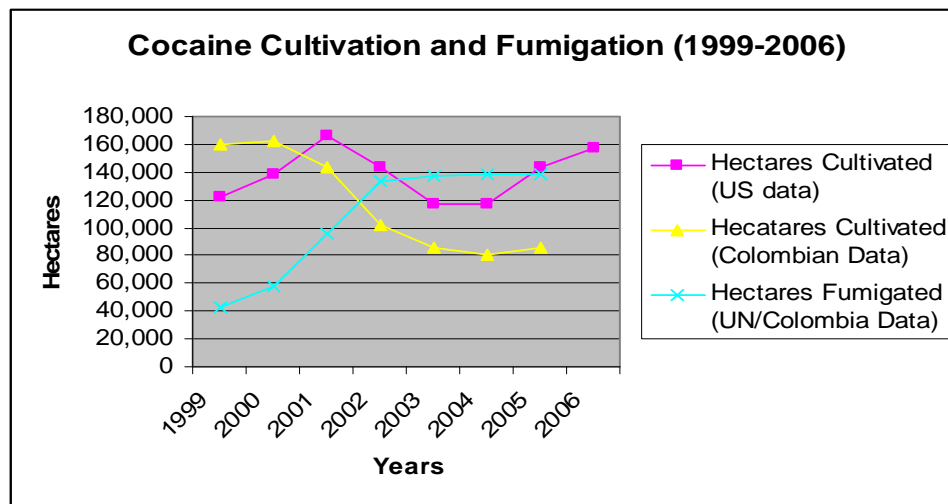


Figure 9: Fumigation and Cultivation of Colombian Cocaine 1999-2006¹⁰³

Figure 8 illustrates that although the fumigation and eradication effort has increased substantially from 43,000 hectares in 1999 to almost 140,000 hectares in 2005, the area cultivated has actually increased by almost 40,000 hectares since 1999 according to the U.S. Department of State and the International Narcotics Strategy Report of 2007.¹⁰⁴ These numbers are disputed by Colombia and the UN, as illustrated in Figure 8, but the U.S. State Department based the larger numbers on a new methodology that includes more remote geography, which in essence recognizes the presence of the “balloon effect,” where narco-traffickers and producers move to fill voids where interdiction and fumigation are not feasible.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, the bottom line is that cocaine production has not decreased over the Plan Colombia timeframe. To bolster this argument, the price of both coca paste and the wholesale price of cocaine steadily decreased over

¹⁰³ Peter DeShazo, Phillip McLean, and Tanya Primiani. *Back From The Brink: Evaluating Progress in Colombia, 1999-2007*. (Washington D.C.: CSIS Press, 2007), 29.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

the past seven years, to include a drop of almost \$100 per kilogram between 2005 and 2006.¹⁰⁶ This indicates that there is no shortage of the product on the market. In addition to the continuing drop in the market price of cocaine, a more disturbing trend is an increase in the overall purity. In a recent report released to Congress after an inquiry in January 2007, the information shows that from 2003 to 2006 the price per pure gram of cocaine decreased from \$210 to \$135, while the purity of the product being produced went from 60% pure to over 70% pure.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, these indicators illustrate that eradication and interdiction are not having the desired effect.

One positive outcome on the counter-narcotics front is that opium cultivation and production have dropped from 100 metric tons in 1999 to 28 metric tons annually in 2005.¹⁰⁸ This is especially good news for the U.S. since the majority of the opium and heroin entering the country has been from Colombia and Mexico and not Afghanistan or the orient. One reason for this down-turn, besides the eradication campaign, may be that producers have shifted to coca production, which is easier to conceal in the rural regions.

There is a tendency from the perspective of the American public to only review the statistics regarding cocaine production and call for a cessation of the prodigious U.S. aid package. This is a parochial view that would only place the government of Colombia in the same perilous situation that it was in the late 1990's. It would also arguably create more problems for U.S. policy in the hemisphere. What should not be overlooked or marginalized are the improvements in other areas under the plan. The Colombian government has displayed an amazing resurgence

¹⁰⁶ United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime. "Coca Cultivation in the Andean Region." (UNODC; Governments of Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru, 2007) http://www.unodc.org/en/crop_monitoring.html (accessed on-line on November 27, 2007).

¹⁰⁷ John M. Walsh. "ONDCP's Update on Cocaine Price and Purity." (Washington Office for Latin America: 2007) <http://www.wola.org/media/Connecting%20the%20Dots%204-23-2007.pdf> (accessed on-line December 15, 2007).

¹⁰⁸ United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime. "World Drug Report 2006." (UNODC: 2007) http://www.unodc.org/pdf/WDR_2006/wdr2006_chap3_opium.pdf (accessed on-line December 15, 2007).

in the past seven years due to the proactive administrations of Presidents Pastrana and Uribe, but this would have not been possible without the aid and support from the United States under the Plan Colombia umbrella.

One of the sectors where this is most visible is the economy. Colombia's GDP rate rose over 10% from 1999 to 2006, from -4.20% to 6.80% with an increase in exports of legal goods from 11 billion annually to almost 30 billion annually.¹⁰⁹ In addition, unemployment has decreased from 18% to around 12% of the population, inflation has decreased by almost 5% from 9.2% to 5.2%, direct foreign investment has increased from around \$1.5 billion dollars to over \$6 billion annually, and the percentage of the population living under the poverty line has decreased by nearly 10%.¹¹⁰ These positive trends clearly show an improvement in the quality of life for Colombians through realized economic viability. More importantly, they indicate a greater level of domestic and international confidence in the Colombian government.

One item to note is that Colombia, while certainly not a nation of wealth by any means, has a vast amount of economic resources and potential. These range from oil and coffee to urban industrialization and sea trade. The prospect is much bleaker in Afghanistan, which is why an economic turn-around for Afghanistan will entail much more energy, money and time. Significant economic development for Afghanistan will require much more than security and stability of governance, although that must be a critical first step. Colombia also has access and port infrastructure to two major sea routes in both the Atlantic and Pacific, which have great potential for trade beyond the illicit nature. Afghanistan is reliant on an often reluctant, if not

¹⁰⁹ Peter DeShazo, Phillip McLean, and Tanya Primiani. *Back From The Brink: Evaluating Progress in Colombia, 1999-2007*. (Washington D.C.: CSIS Press, 2007), 37-40.

¹¹⁰ Embassy of Colombia. "Plan Colombia: A Success Story." (Embassy of Colombia; Washington D.C., September 17, 2007). http://www.colombiaemb.org/opencms/opencms/trade/Plan_Colombia.pdf (accessed on-line on November 29, 2007).

recalcitrant neighbor in Pakistan for access to a port. This is yet another barrier to be breached in the long-term legal economic viability of Afghanistan.

Another important area for review in Colombia is in domestic crime. For much of the past century, Colombia has been paralyzed by the internal violence within the country and the government's inability to control it. There has been a significant issue with kidnappings. These kidnappings have tarnished Colombia's public image internationally and dissuaded many foreign companies from considering serious economic investment. The FARC has become quite adept at targeting employees of international corporations and then using the media to wage an aggressive information campaign to get both ransom payments and government concessions. Therefore, a sustained decrease in the crime and kidnapping rates would be significant not only from a security standpoint, but also from an economic one. From 2000 to 2006 the number of reported kidnappings decreased from over 3,500 to only 289.¹¹¹ From 1999 to 2007, total annual homicides recorded decreased from approximately 25,000 to 17,000, with a high of almost 30,000 homicides recorded in 2002.¹¹² Another indicator that is related to the overall homicide rate but better displays the nature of the violence between the insurgents and paramilitaries is the number of annual massacres in which more than four or five people were murdered in a single event. In 2001, there were over 160 massacres in which at least four people were murdered and over 90 massacres in which at least five people were murdered.¹¹³ In 2004, there were less than 100 total massacres for the entire year.¹¹⁴

These are dramatic changes in a relatively short time that can be directly attributed to elements of the Plan Colombia program. As mentioned previously, prior to 2000, the Colombian

¹¹¹ Peter DeShazo, Phillip McLean, and Tanya Primiani. *Back From The Brink: Evaluating Progress in Colombia, 1999-2007*. (Washington D.C.: CSIS Press, 2007), 20.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid. 20.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 21.

government and military lacked the operational and tactical reach to be effective in a sustained offensive against the insurgents and paramilitaries, but the extensive funding and training of the Colombian military has enabled the government to provide an environment of greater security in areas previously virtually ungoverned. Under Plan Colombia the national expenditures on defense and security have increased from 2.38% of the GDP to 4.23% of the GDP, which has allowed the Colombian army to increase by more than 50,000 personnel.¹¹⁵ In addition, over 100 fixed and rotary wing aircraft have been added to the Colombian inventory to conduct both security and counter-narcotics missions.¹¹⁶

Once again, the expansion of the Colombian military and tangible improvement in the security situation raises the question over why the same results are not being attained in the counter-narcotics mission. One reason is that the Colombian government still places primacy on defeating the insurgency while giving a more limited effort and some satisfying lip-service to the U.S. on the counter-narcotics front. The illicit narcotics trade is fueled by the labor and efforts of normal rural citizens, and not violent insurgents or criminals. This makes countering narcotics more difficult to balance with counterinsurgency. Overall, without having an adequate alternative, the government risks further disenfranchisement of the population and losing many of its recent gains if it is viewed as directly targeting the peasantry. Another reason for the poor performance in the counter-narcotics fight is that the de-centralization of the narcotics trade is continuing. This can be observed by the movement of production and distribution centers farther away from populated areas into even more remote areas along border regions that are still ungoverned.

¹¹⁵ Colombian Department of Justice and Security – National Planning Department, *Plan Colombia Progress Report: 1999-2005*, September, 2006.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

The Colombian approach may actually be successful in the long run and could be an example for Afghanistan. The actions of the Colombian government indicate that they want to establish a foundation of security through government control before they seriously address completely eliminating illicit narcotics. This is rational from the Colombian perspective but hard to understand from an American one. Too often we expect immediate results due to the fickle nature of politics and the election cycle instead of waiting for desired second and third order effects. Overall, the improvement in the security situation is significant and may signal a greater potential for countering narcotics for the future. The U.S. has always desired a more immediate and concurrent solution in Colombia, because curtailing drugs, not Colombian internal stability, resonates much louder with local politicians that have to justify this massive aid package.

The next indicator in Plan Colombia is in regard to total governance. This includes corruption, effectiveness of the judiciary and public confidence in the government. The improvement in security has allowed for a subsequent improvement in the overall status of governance and ability to provide basic services for the citizenry. Although somewhat arbitrary, a recent report on governance by the World Bank shows that Colombia has made positive gains. In overall government effectiveness on a scale from 1 to 100 with 100 being the best, Colombia had a rating of 39.8 in 1998 and a rating of 55.9 in 2006.¹¹⁷ In control of corruption, Colombia improved from 25.2 to 51.9 between 1998 and 2002.¹¹⁸ In government accountability, Colombia improved from 35.1 to 41.8, and in the rule of law, Colombia improved from a rating of 20.5 to 29.5 in that same time period.¹¹⁹ These ratings were based on census information, survey data and comparisons with other nations world-wide, which may not be entirely accurate, but do illustrate some significant positive trends. One of the most telling statistics is a recent Gallup Poll

¹¹⁷ The World Bank, "Governance Matters 2007: Country Data Report for Colombia 1996-2006," <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi2007/pdf/c47.pdf> (accessed December 19, 2007).

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

regarding the public perception of a potential guerilla victory and government collapse. In this poll the percentage of respondents that thought the insurgents would win and that the government would collapse went from over 60% in 1999 to 20% in 2007.¹²⁰ These statistics are good indicators because they show a positive shift change in the confidence in the government's efforts and stability. Once again, the forward projection of the Colombian military has set the conditions for the expansion of government run social welfare programs with police and judicial systems in rural areas that were once insurgent strongholds.

The final indicator deals with Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Not widely known in the U.S. is the fact that Colombia has the third largest number of IDPs of any nation worldwide due to almost fifty years of conflict. The International Red Cross estimates that there have been anywhere from 1.8 to 3 million IDPs in Colombia since 1985.¹²¹ Under Plan Colombia, the Colombian government invested nearly \$431 million dollars into policy development and execution for the reintegration of IDPs with extremely positive results to date.¹²² While numbers vary according to the sources, the Colombian government highlights that the number of recognized IDPs in Colombia has dropped from 400,000 in 2002 to roughly 225,000 in 2006.¹²³ This is significant because it not only shows that the Colombian government is attempting to solve a prodigious problem with NGO assistance, but the reduction of IDPs and camps takes away a valuable resource to both the insurgents and narcotics traffickers. IDP camps allowed

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Peter DeShazo, Phillip McLean, and Tanya Primiani. *Back From The Brink: Evaluating Progress in Colombia, 1999-2007*. (Washington D.C.: CSIS Press, 2007), 17.

¹²¹ International Committee of the Red Cross, "IDPs in Colombia: A Joint Needs Assessment by the ICRC and World Food Programme," [http://www.icrc.org/Web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/6B2KER/\\$File/Colombia_220305.pdf](http://www.icrc.org/Web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/6B2KER/$File/Colombia_220305.pdf) (accessed December 19, 2007).

¹²² Colombian Department of Justice and Security – National Planning Department, *Plan Colombia Progress Report: 1999-2005*, September, 2006.

¹²³ Peter DeShazo, Phillip McLean, and Tanya Primiani. *Back From The Brink: Evaluating Progress in Colombia, 1999-2007*. (Washington D.C.: CSIS Press, 2007), 24.

insurgents and narcotics traffickers good cover from Colombian authorities and also provided fertile recruiting grounds for people that were either disgruntled, in need of food and money for survival, or both.

The most significant factor that has contributed to the success of Plan Colombia has been the strong leadership of both President's Pastrana and Uribe over the past eight years. President Pastrana developed the initial strategy for the plan, which was the concept that forward projection of the military was the only way to effectively stabilize the country and that the subsequent stability was the pre-requisite condition necessary in order to address the myriad of other issues, to include illicit narcotics. Presidents Pastrana and Uribe also realized that the only way to get the quantity and quality of personnel and equipment required to defeat the large and well established insurgent forces was through U.S. support. Another aspect that improved the overall popular opinion and view of the government was the more conciliatory nature of the Pastrana and Uribe administrations. While they actively pursued and obtained the military tools and force structure necessary to counter the insurgent and paramilitary forces as a centerpiece of the strategy, they also were resigned to allow for re-integration of those elements into society if they so desired and denounced their former causes. This is reflected in the numerous peace talks during the Plan Colombia era. These efforts are a good example of how that national leadership in Colombia employed a careful balance between the carrot and the stick, which was highlighted by the official demobilization of the paramilitary group AUC in 2006.

Ironically, the one big perceived failure of this strategy, which was seriously targeting and eradicating illicit narcotics, or at least making the U.S. government believe that, was the necessary ticket to get U.S. funding and political support for the program. The contributing factors for this were varied. First, eradication cannot be successful without providing a financially comparable alternative for the rural population. The reality is that the eradication effort may force farmers to move locations, but the benefits of growing coca far outweigh the alternative of going to an IDP camp or growing a legal crop that does not have a market. Second, eradicating

narcotics in areas that have not yet been secured by the military and police only anger the local populace, thus providing an easy recruiting source for insurgents. This is another example of how little can be accomplished if there is not a persistent presence in an area or community as U.S. forces have discovered in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Third, simple eradication did not account for the continued de-centralization and flexibility of the narco-traffickers, which is illustrated by their movement to more remote and cross-border regions. Lastly, the true nature of the symbiotic relationship was not well understood. While the Colombian insurgency and narcotics traffickers have grown to be mutually supportive, the insurgents need the money from the narco-traffickers far more than the narco-traffickers need the protection from the insurgent organizations. Money is often far more enduring, especially in countries with high poverty levels, than an egalitarian insurgent organization that is falling flat on its promises. This is the reason why success against the FARC and ELN may only represent a temporary set-back or be transparent to the illicit narcotics trade, due to the de-centralization, adaptability and resiliency that the narcotics trade has displayed before.

Overall, Plan Colombia has been an aggressive and holistic approach towards a very complex set of issues and problems, but the successes and failures must be viewed through the cultural and social lenses before applying the Plan Colombia strategy, either in its entirety or by individual line of effort in Afghanistan. Plan Colombia and any derivation applied in Afghanistan must also take a long-term approach in understanding the problem and evaluating the overall effectiveness, because many of the positives may not be seen for years.

A Proposal for Afghanistan

“Today many Afghans believe that it is not drugs, but an ill-conceived war on drugs that threatens their economy and nascent democracy.”

- Ashraf Ghani, Former Afghan Finance Minister¹²⁴

While the situation in Afghanistan is complex and difficult, it is not impossible to solve with international resolve and adequate resources. The reality is that all parties involved must understand up front that there is no panacea that will instantly eliminate the narcotics problem and establish government stability in Afghanistan. The solution will be long-term and require patience and sustained dedication from the international community, the Afghan people and Afghan government over an extended period of time. This is not a popular approach due to the sheer amount of time and money it will require from other governments, but it is a realistic approach. I propose a strategy that has five lines of effort in addition to the underlying key element of time. Some of these lines of effort are similar to those outlined in Plan Colombia and others take a different approach based on the unique aspects of Afghanistan and successful efforts to eliminate poppy cultivation in other countries like Thailand and Laos. The lines of effort are: 1) Interdiction Partnering; 2) Security Improvement; 3) Economic viability and incentives; 4) Alternative Development; 5) Demand-side focus in major consumer countries.

Interdiction partnering is not a new concept and is being actively pursued in the Andean region between the governments of Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Peru. The objective of interdiction partnering is to get a vested interest and unified effort from all neighboring countries to eliminate the transnational drug trafficking routes. The desired effects are an

¹²⁴ Barnett Rubin and Omar Zakhilwal, “A War on Drugs, or a War on Farmers?” *The Wall Street Journal*, January 11, 2005.

increase in the price of narcotics due to a reduction in market supply, a decrease in the number of international traffickers due to capture and punitive measures.

This obviously requires a substantial investment by neighboring countries in border security and reconnaissance, which raises the issue over why these countries would desire to assist in this effort. One of the biggest reasons is that opium has not only become a transitory good through these countries on the periphery, it has also become a significant social ill, albeit one that is not widely publicized. In Iran alone there are officially between 2.5 and 3.5 million opium addicts, which equates to roughly 3% of the Iranian population.¹²⁵ This may not seem overtly significant given the number of drug addicts in the U.S., but to highlight the sheer importance of that percentage is that it is the highest national addiction rate in the world.¹²⁶ The unofficial addiction rate is undoubtedly higher. In conjunction with the high addiction rate in Iran is a sharp increase in crime and HIV that are drug related and also rarely mentioned by the Islamic regime.¹²⁷ Much to Iran's credit, they have recognized the problem internally and established over 800 kilometers of obstacles and barriers along the Afghan border, but claim that without more helicopters, night vision equipment and overall assistance they can not adequately counter the threat.¹²⁸ While counter-narcotics efforts in Iran have not been widely publicized, they have paid some substantial dividends. In 2006, the government of Iran seized more opium and heroin than any other nation worldwide at 231,352 thousand kilograms, which illustrates the Iranian effort and highlights the potential for a willing partner in the interdiction fight.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Bill Samii. "Iran: Country's Drug Problems Appear to be Worsening," *Radio Free Europe*, July 18, 2005. <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/07/c7250035-e43c-4a33-a019-a5198ed722c2.html> (accessed January 3, 2008).

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *The 2007 World Drug Report* (New York: UN Publications, 2007), 47,49.

The mere thought of partnering with a country like Iran may seem remote given the current international environment, but this is the type of necessary and critical engagement that needs to occur in addressing a situation as unique and complex as Afghanistan. This type of partnership is also a fairly non-evasive way of easing tensions that may set the conditions to achieve greater leverage on other serious issues, not to mention a vehicle to enable a better working relationship between the European Union (EU) and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). One undesired effect and serious concern, both regionally and internationally, would be the reaction of other key nations in the region, specifically Israel and Saudi Arabia, to any sort of tacit support for the Iranian regime and military. It would be an anathema to Israel due to Iran's public rhetoric over the destruction of the Israeli state. It would also raise serious concerns in Saudi Arabia due to the religious tensions between the major Sunni and Shia states over the balance of power in the Persian Gulf region that currently favors the Saudi regime and predominantly Sunni powers. In addition to the regional challenges, this would also be a hard sell to U.S. politicians and the American population due to the negative interaction between the U.S. and Iran since the Islamic revolution in 1979.

As far as Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are concerned, drug use is also on a dramatic increase and those nations have even fewer resources than Iran to interdict the drug traffic.¹³⁰ This regional interdiction partnering would likely have the greatest impact on curtailing the narcotics supply to major consumer countries in Europe and Central Asia, but it is directly dependent on the level and duration of international assistance. The enhancement of regional interdiction assistance and partnering is also favorable because it is one part of this strategy than can be executed concurrently with security and infrastructure improvements in Afghanistan, whereas eradication of the opium poppies themselves should be accomplished in a

more sequential manner after there is both stability of governance and a viable economic alternative.

While interdiction partnering is an essential element in the counter-narcotics struggle, security within Afghanistan is paramount for survival as a nation. Security improvement within Afghanistan is the pre-requisite condition for any sustained improvement in both countering narcotics and stabilization of the government. In Plan Colombia, the large investment in the military has proved relatively successful at stabilizing a government that had virtually failed only a decade ago. While fighting the cocaine traffickers has been far less successful, primarily due to the over-reliance on the flawed eradication campaign that has oddly carried over to Afghanistan, the improvement of the security forces set the conditions for government stability and a real potential for success in the long-term counter-narcotics fight. This highlights an important lesson from Plan Colombia, which is that a more phased and sequential strategy has a greater opportunity for comprehensive success. Therefore, the primary threats in Afghanistan, which are both the Taliban/Al Qa'ida insurgency and the belligerent rogue warlords, need to be addressed first before any significant effort to counter narcotics production and trafficking can be realized. This will require an extensive program to train and equip the Afghan National Army and police forces to not only become functional, but to be a force that can have rapid projection throughout all areas of the country. This force must also be large enough and have the necessary internal logistical support to maintain a forward presence. These are the conditions that Colombia has been successfully working towards with tangible progress against the AUC and FARC. These are also the same conditions that Afghanistan must work towards in defeating the Taliban and gaining control of the entrepreneurial regional governors, or warlords.

¹³⁰ Robert Ponce, "Rising Heroin Abuse in Central Asia Raises Threat of Health Crisis," EurasiaNet.org, article posted March 29, 2002, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav032902a.shtml> (accessed January 10, 2008).

In Colombia, the U.S. unilaterally funded, resourced and trained the Colombian forces because Colombian cocaine has a direct impact on American society. On that same line, the major consumer countries in Europe and Asia need to play a bigger role in physical and financial contributions in a multi-lateral approach because Afghan opium and heroin has a direct impact on their societies. Although Colombia was on the brink of failure in the late 1990s, the current short-comings of the Afghan forces and government are also far more serious than those observed in Colombia, which is another reason why this strategy requires a serious and sustained multi-lateral commitment and effort. Once again, the caveat is that all contributing parties must realize that security improvement, while critical, will not be instantaneous in Afghanistan. A larger and more potent military will give the central government in Afghanistan two capabilities it has never had, which are the ability to counter the Taliban with less external support over time and an enforcement capability against warlords that do not work within the framework of the government.

While security improvement is the foundation required for overall improvement, economic viability and incentives are required for sustained growth and long-term stability. As discussed previously, Afghanistan has become a narco-state not out of convenience, but out of necessity. The key to reviving the economy and improving the quality of life for Afghan citizens is by aggressively improving the national infrastructure, developing more arable land, providing and subsidizing a serious alternative development program and only eradicating the poppy crops when there is a viable alternative in place. One previous mistake has been the policy of eradication first with a promise of crop substitution in the future or a one time lump-sum payment for the eradication. This approach has failed in both Afghanistan and Colombia because the effort was half-hearted and did not address the greater and enduring needs of the farmers. Infrastructure improvement includes the construction of both physical and institutional systems. A farmer must be able to sell what he produces, therefore roads need to be improved, areas still need to be de-mined, markets need to be constructed or improved, and most importantly, the

irrigation systems need to be overhauled on a national level to support a larger crop base than poppies.

Another challenge will be the equitable distribution of money for infrastructure projects due to the inherent nature of tribal politics and corruption within Afghanistan. International monitoring, in conjunction with an Afghan military presence, will be required to ensure not only adequate appropriation of the funds provided but also to temper any tensions between warlords due to perceived disparities of fund allocation. As far as institutional improvements, a farmer must be able to procure credit not based solely on his stockpile of opium poppies. This will require the central government to establish a central bank that is subsidized and supported by international partners. This bank should be a hybrid between what is effective for modern international transactions and the *hawala* system that the majority of the population is accustomed to. By maintaining some form of the *hawala* system, the bank can have the reach required across all regions of the country along with the traditional familiarity. The use of micro-grants and micro-loans to jump start small business should also be integrated. Micro-grants and loans have gained traction in Iraq with tangible success.¹³¹ This new system combined with improvements in the transportation and telecommunications infrastructure will slowly wean many citizens off the illicit narco-economy by creating both capacity and access to a legal means of revenue. The lesson learned from Plan Colombia is that any effort to eradicate the coca before adequate infrastructure and a suitable alternative crop are emplaced will fail and merely force farmers and narco-trafficking operations to move to new and less vulnerable areas, which are typically where the insurgency is strongest, thus reinforcing that nexus.

The next line of effort is alternative development. Crop substitution was mentioned briefly in the economic improvement line of effort, but it is another very important and necessary

¹³¹ William Selby, "Micro-Grants Help Rebuild Iraq's Economy," American Forces Press Service, January 10, 2008.

aspect of this strategy that needs further discussion because of the many challenges it faces. For the past thirty years, the primary cash crop in Afghanistan has been opium poppies, which makes it one of the only reliable sources of income for a generally poor agrarian population. Breaking this reliance is more than merely handing out grain seed and sending the farmers on their way. It is another step in the process that must sequentially follow security and infrastructure improvement. Once again, alternative development in the agrarian sector will not gain much traction and quite possibly be a moot point if the neighboring countries do not improve their interdiction efforts because demand is still the driving factor in the illicit narcotics trade. The stark reality is that as long there are heroin addicts there will be a high demand for poppy cultivation, so farmers will need compelling economic reasons to switch to a legal crop. Traffickers will also need compelling interdiction and punitive measures to curtail their efforts.

The U.S. also has a bad habit of undermining its own efforts, which can easily happen when it comes to market competition. If the U.S. and international community do not make a commitment to fully support and subsidize the Afghan agricultural exports, then this effort will be set to fail from the start. Afghanistan needs a jump-start to their agrarian economy with a guaranteed market and preferential price. If this does not happen, the revenues will never be able to dominate the money from poppy cultivation and farmers will have no long-term incentive to grow any proposed new crop. The harder sell will be to American and European farmers who may have to give up some market share to allow long-term growth of the Afghan market. This is not only an affront to the U.S. capitalist nature but will be unpopular with any politician that has a rural constituency. While seemingly impossible, Laos has almost eliminated its opium poppy cultivation through a long-term phased crop substitution program supported by the UN.¹³² It is also important to note that Laos has been engaged in a low level insurgency over the past 40 years

¹³² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. “Laos: Opium Survey 2005” (UNODC, 2005),6-7.

with the Hmong minority group that has been aggressively targeted.¹³³ This is another example that shows that once security is established crop substitution can have long-term success if resourced appropriately.

One popular idea often proposed is the development of a licit opiate industry in Afghanistan, which uses poppies to produce morphine and codeine, by licensing producers. While this is ostensibly a reasonable idea, in reality it is unrealistic and any movement into the licit opiate industry would be insignificant on a national scale. There are already five countries that produce and export opiates for the licit market, which are Turkey, India, Australia, Spain and France.¹³⁴ The bottom line is that the current supply being produced far outweighs the legal amount required and used annually in the world. On average, the annual amount of legal opiate required is around between 200 and 300 metric tons, while the amount already being produced is close to 400 metric tons, thus creating a glut in the market of over 100 metric tons with no apparent room for additional opiates from Afghanistan.¹³⁵ Would these other opiate producing countries be willing to restrict the amounts produced to enable Afghanistan to enter the industry? That would be highly unlikely and even if they did waiver, the amount of Afghan opiate that would be produced and available in the shared market would still be marginal at best for comprehensive economic growth at the national scale. Any licit capability with a small market share would also be unlikely to dissuade many producers from entering the illegal market because the price and profit potential of the illicit product remains much higher. This dilemma can be observed in India, a nation that does have a large share of the licit opiate industry, yet production for the illicit trade remains a significant problem because the demand is still far greater for opium

¹³³ Nelson Rand. "Abandoned Army: Insurgency in Laos." *The San Francisco Chronicle*, June 14, 2004.

¹³⁴ David Mansfield. "An Analysis of Licit Poppy Cultivation: India and Turkey," Consultant Report to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the Government of the United Kingdom. (April 2001), 1.

¹³⁵ Ibid. 5.

than for morphine or codeine, and unlike Australia, France and Spain, farmers in India are still in relative poverty and work primarily to survive.¹³⁶ In essence, while the transition to the licit opiate industry is an interesting idea that has gained some popular support, it is based more out of myth and the reality is that it is not a reasonable plan for any sort of long-term or comprehensive economic development that is desperately needed in Afghanistan.

The last line of effort is an increase in demand-side drug programs in major consumer countries. Admittedly, the focus of this paper has been primarily to look at the external environments in Colombia and Afghanistan where there is a nexus between an insurgency and the narcotics trade, but domestic and internal drug-use remains at the center of the larger problem and needs to be addressed in any comprehensive strategy. Too often the domestic and international efforts to counter the wider narcotics problem are seen as two separate items, but they need to be planned, funded and executed in concert. Obviously, a significant reduction in the number of drug addicts in consumer countries would have a negative effect on the production and trafficking of illicit narcotics. This undoubtedly may be the toughest element to achieve positive gains, which can be illustrated by the simple fact that although the U.S. has officially been fighting the War on Drugs for nearly 40 years there were still 19.7 million Americans, to include 15% of all high school students, who used an illicit drug monthly in 2005, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).¹³⁷ This lack of success is not a reason to abandon the effort nor does it show that the various U.S. administrations have taken the situation lightly. In the 2007 U.S. National Drug Control Strategy, there are almost 30 pages of a 45 page document dedicated almost solely to demand-side addiction and drug control issues. On the flip side there are only two pages discussing Afghanistan, which brings into question how

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ George W. Bush, *2007 U.S. National Drug Control Strategy* (Washington D.C.: The White House, 2007), 4.

serious the U.S. actually is on resolving the Afghan narcotics problem. Overall, it can be reasonably assumed that without the vast network of social programs that address prevention and drug addiction, the situation would be far worse in the U.S. The first challenge is that while trafficking and production operations can be directly targeted with military, economic and political tools, personal will is often the only thing that can overcome severe dependency issues. The second challenge is that the Afghan opium and heroin problem does not directly affect the U.S. in great quantity, so the initiative in prevention and demand side reduction needs to occur abroad.

In the case of Afghanistan, the demand reduction focus must be in Europe and Asia, which are the primary regions of consumption. While the numbers vary, in many European countries there are between 5 and 10 people per 1000 identified as problem drug users.¹³⁸ Also, out of the estimated 11 million opiate addicts in the world, 3.3 million are European according to a recent UN report.¹³⁹ The vast majority of Afghan opium is ending up in Europe fueling this problem. Of equal significance is the growing usage problem in Central Asia. Unlike Europe, the countries of Central Asia, and more specifically in Iran, have three issues which subvert any serious dependency treatment. The first issue is that many of these countries have cultures that spurn treatment and treat drug addicts as pariahs. By turning a blind eye to the societal addiction issues, the problem just proliferates. The second dilemma is that these countries do not have the wealth and resources to dedicate to the addiction problem as do the more resource-rich nations in Europe and the U.S. The third issue is that the internal economies in the Central Asian countries are still suffering from the malaise of being under the Soviet system, which has created an

¹³⁸ European Monitoring Center for Drugs and Drug Addiction, *Annual Report 2006: The State of the Drug Problem in Europe Statistical Bulletin* (Brussels, Belgium: Publication of the European Communities, 2006), Table PDU-1.

¹³⁹ Richard Norton-Taylor, "Record Opium Crop in Southern Afghanistan." *The Guardian*, June 27, 2007.

environment where personal hope is minimal and drugs provide an easy escape for a lot of disillusioned people. Therefore, while many European countries need to also improve and expand their programs, Central Asia offers an opportunity for demand reduction partnering as well as interdiction partnering. Unfortunately it also offers an equal opportunity for traffickers to solicit a profitable regional market which is desirable due to lower risk and transport costs.

Like interdiction, demand reduction partnering will require a long-term funding and resource approach by the international community, but unlike interdiction, assistance with improving social programs in countries like Iran will not carry the negative international stigma that security and interdiction assistance could incur. Assistance in demand-reduction may also be an attractive carrot for countries like Iran because the assistance could remain virtually transparent to its citizens. These governments would not have to show any overt acquiescence to western nations by accepting the support and aid, which might be viewed as a sign of weakness. If this is to be successful in countries like Iran, the government will also have to publicly acknowledge the breadth of the problem and encourage treatment, which may be the hardest hurdle to surpass in that culture. Another positive aspect of demand reduction partnering with the Central Asian countries is that if narcotic abuse is curtailed regionally, it will require traffickers to take greater risk at transporting large amounts of narcotics over a greater distance to the European market, instead of unloading a substantial amount in the Central Asian countries. One more warning sign for Afghanistan from the Andean region is the recent transition from traditional drug use, like chewing coca leaves and drinking coca tea, to the use of the refined and more addictive product, which can be observed by rising addiction rates over the past decade.¹⁴⁰ It has already been mentioned that the dependency issue has historically not been an Afghan problem, nor had it been a significant problem in the Andean region traditionally, but demand reduction programs should be implemented now to pre-empt a looming problem.

Finally, one item that is an integral part of Plan Colombia and included in the initial plan for Afghanistan was judicial reform and control. Judicial control is fundamentally based on a national system of government that is a concept quite foreign to Afghanistan and does not seem readily feasible in that country. By establishing security throughout the country and providing strong incentives for regional governors that comply and assist with the long-term counter-narcotics and counter-insurgency effort, a form of judicial control that is unique to the tribal society of Afghanistan is likely to develop. The more pressing objective is that the Afghan government attains the ability to widely control and implement policy beyond Kabul.

Overall, this proposed strategy has a vision for a secure Afghanistan that is economically viable beyond poppy cultivation, but not necessarily contingent on a democratic Afghanistan based on a national system of governance.

Evaluating The Strategy

In order to examine and evaluate the viability of this proposed strategy, I will use Art Lykke's model for military strategy. Although Lykke specifically designed his model for the analysis of national and strategic military strategy, it is equally as appropriate for other designs, to include the counter-insurgency and counter-narcotics strategy proposed in this study. Lykke's model is not complex and generally easy to understand. It is based on the concept that strategy is the equitable nexus and linkage of objectives, concepts, and resources.¹⁴¹ In other words, the objectives are the ends, the concepts are the ways, and the resources are the means.¹⁴² Lykke's fundamental premise is that these elements must all be proportionate or in a balance, otherwise

¹⁴⁰ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *2007 Annual Report* (New York: UN), 55.

¹⁴¹ Arthur F. Lykke, "Toward an Understanding of Military Strategy," in *Military Strategy: Theory and Application*, ed. Arthur F. Lykke (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 1989), 5.

¹⁴² *Ibid.* 4.

risk is assumed in areas where there is an imbalance between the objectives, concepts, and resources.¹⁴³ Interestingly, this construct fits quite well with the Clausewitzian trinity. The political environment determines the objectives or ends, the military determines and implements the concepts or ways, and the people, through Congress, provide the resources or means.¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, Bruce Reider in a recent article in *Parameters* reinforces Lykke's model by arguing that if the ends, ways, and means are not in "harmony" or balanced that there will be a "strategic disconnect."¹⁴⁵ To better understand this concept, Lykke uses the analogy of a three legged stool, where the legs are the objectives, the concepts and the resources, which are below the top of the stool, which is the proposed strategy.¹⁴⁶ Obviously, if one leg of the stool is shorter than the others the stool will either tilt, which is the risk assumed, or fall, which illustrates a failed strategy. Therefore, using this framework, we will look at the objectives, concepts, and resources of the proposed strategy for Afghanistan.

The four main objectives for the proposed Afghan strategy are defeating the insurgency, stability of governance, economic viability and long-term marginalization of opium poppy production. The first objective sets the conditions for the second objective to be met and the second and third objectives set the conditions for the fourth to be met. As mentioned previously, there is a certain sequential nature to this strategy, which is an essential element. Too often, as witnessed in Colombia and in the initial Afghan plan, a strategy is executed on multiple fronts concurrently and the efforts end up being mutually destructive. The idea of mass crop eradication and counter-insurgency is an example of how seemingly productive efforts can have a negative impact on the other.

¹⁴³ Ibid. 5.

¹⁴⁴ Bruce J. Reider, "Strategic Realignment: Ends, Ways, and Means in Iraq," *Parameters* 37, no. 4 (Winter 2007-08): 48.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

The next question to be addressed is if the ways, or strategic concepts, are congruent with the objectives. In regards to defeating the insurgency and establishing security, the method is by strengthening the Afghan security forces and military. This includes resourcing, funding, and training along the same lines as conducted in Colombia, except must be far more extensive. As mentioned previously, the security that comes with defeating the insurgency and controlling the regional governors sets the conditions for establishing a stable and effective government and improving the economy. The economy and government in most countries are mutually supportive. Typically in countries where the economy is thriving there is little political and social discord and vice versa. Once there is relative security throughout the country, the method for improving the economy is through infrastructure improvement, alternative development, crop subsidization, banking reform, public and private international investment and long-term economic commitments by industrialized and narcotics consuming countries. Therefore security plus economic improvement that is seen nation-wide down to the lowest levels of society will result in greater stability in the government. One of the greater challenges in regards to strategic concepts, and an area where the stool leg would be shorter and risk assumed, is in the area of interdiction partnering. The concept is valid and has great potential, but the cultural and political dynamics make it a very difficult prospect. I mention interdiction partnering at this stage because curtailing the external flow, not the cultivation, is an important step at revitalizing the economy. Although not intuitive, it is also critical in setting the conditions for the final objective of long-term opium poppy eradication.

The resources required to accomplish this strategy, which is the third leg in Lykke's model, is perhaps the weakest leg. This is not because the strategy does not have potential, it is because the resources required are almost all external to Afghanistan and will require an

¹⁴⁶ Arthur F. Lykke, "Toward an Understanding of Military Strategy," in *Military Strategy: Theory and Application*, ed. Arthur F. Lykke (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 1989), 6,7.

extensive investment in time and money by the international community, to include security commitments by some of the volatile regional neighbors including Iran and Pakistan. Overall, the resources required would be funding to build, equip and train the security forces; money and physical capital to build an adequate agricultural sector and infrastructure; money, physical capital and international commitments to build a viable stand-alone economy and banking system; money and international cooperation to strengthen regional partners and neighboring countries to Afghanistan; money to improve demand reduction programs in Europe and Central Asia. This is not a small order and will draw much criticism and consternation from many politicians in the U.S. and within the broader international community. The hefty price tag of nearly \$6 billion dollars to date in Colombia has drawn the ire of many in Washington and the job to be accomplished in Afghanistan pales in comparison.¹⁴⁷ In addition, the Colombian government co-opted much of the costs with the U.S. for Plan Colombia, which was a big selling point between President Pastrana and the U.S., whereas Afghanistan does not have that same financial leverage to assist in the most basic way. The wild-card in the entire equation is co-opting the different warlords and tribes with the minimum requirement of tacit buy-in. Without this critical element, the metaphorical stool that Lykke uses will not even receive its first nail.

Overall, using the Lykke model of a balanced approach between objectives, concepts, and resources, it is clear that the proposed strategy for Afghanistan is not a stool with three equal legs. This does not make the proposed strategy invalid, but it does highlight that its success depends on many assumptions and therefore it assumes a lot of risk. This should not be a surprise because the situation in Afghanistan, as in many other regions where there is an insurgency and narco-economy, is not black and white. There are many factors and dynamics involved as I have discussed throughout this study which makes Afghanistan an interesting challenge for the

¹⁴⁷ Peter DeShazo, Phillip MCLean, and Tanya Primiani. *Back From The Brink: Evaluating Progress in Colombia, 1999-2007*. (Washington D.C.: CSIS Press, 2007), 48.

international community if they decide to address this problem in a comprehensive and serious manner. The nails that will hold this metaphorical stool together are buy-in by the Afghan government and ultimately the people. If the Afghan government remains a passive partner in the process, the stool will never be solid.

Conclusion

Throughout this study there has been a continuous juxtaposition between the situations in Colombia and Afghanistan. This was to illustrate that although the basic framework of the narcotics trade and insurgency has similar characteristics based on the mutually supportive nature of the insurgents and narco-traffickers, the two situations are actually quite different and demand different approaches. The situations are different due to a different history of governance between the national system and a de-centralized tribal system, the geographic location of the two countries which either inhibits or enhances economic productivity, and the culture of the two regions. That being said, many lessons can and should be adapted from Plan Colombia to include placing primacy of security as a foundation for stable governance and not aggressively eradicating the source crops until there is an adequate alternative and social support base for those farmers involved. These are all concepts that highlight why the U.S. and international community need to learn from the successes and failures to date in both Colombia and Afghanistan, as well as look to other regional success stories, like Laos, in the implementation of a new approach in Afghanistan

Overall, there is no easy solution for Afghanistan, yet many of the attempts made to date have been over-simplified and have given little thought to negative second and third order effects. These efforts have also not been well integrated or resourced, which has led to a dramatic increase in opium poppy production and decline in stability for the new government, which are the exact opposite outcomes of the original disjointed plan. Expediency, not efficiency or

adequacy, has been the norm thus far in Afghanistan, which must change for any positive results to be gained.

The strategy proposed in this study addresses the current situation within the context of those previous failures with a more comprehensive, integrated and structured approach. The proposed strategy is also based on a more sequential and long-term time horizon that extends well beyond a single election cycle. The security situation must be resolved before any tangible progress can be made in eliminating the illicit narcotics production. Security is the linchpin for governance and economic growth. Only after these objectives have been met can the opium poppy crop be realistically eradicated.

While there are some new and adapted concepts discussed in this monograph, to include regional partnering in interdiction and demand reduction, aggressive and sustained crop subsidization and a modified national banking structure, these concepts are only as viable as the international support and sustained interest in them. This is not a strategy that can be executed quickly or inexpensively, which is why this plan assumes a lot of risk. The international community, to include the U.S., is typically very fickle and acts out of self-interest. For countries that are already not direct stake-holders in Afghanistan, there may be no compelling reason to get involved and assist, even if they are a major opiate consumer. Other countries, including the U.S., may quickly lose focus of the narcotics situation and disengage if the security situation improves. This is a dangerous dilemma because Afghanistan will quickly fall back into the abyss and remain a destitute nation and a hot-bed for future problems if support is quickly withdrawn. This scenario is clearly not beyond the realm of possibility as the U.S. has largely ignored or turned its' back on Afghanistan for most of its history when national self-interest was not involved. That being said, the Afghan government itself must also become more involved and not expect the international community to do all its' bidding.

In conclusion, there are many reasons why the proposed strategy might not reach the desired endstate, but not being a realistic plan is not one of them. The plan offers some very

difficult and progressive steps, to include a closer partnership with Iran. Some may say this is not realistic, but given the regional interest in keeping the Sunni Taliban at bay and solving their internal addiction epidemic, it is a partnership worth exploring for the best interests of all parties involved. The primary risk in this plan is in losing the dedication and patience for a long-term approach to Afghanistan by the international community. This includes the necessary incubation period for the establishment of a secure environment and tangible economic development before attacking the narcotics issue. While unpalatable to sell in public, it is a logical and reasonable way to approach this multi-layered issue. The future is still very unclear for Afghanistan, but the plan proposed in this study provides an alternate and viable way of looking for a solution based not only on lessons learned from both Colombia and Afghanistan, but also from the specific regional and cultural nuances of Afghanistan.

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